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HITCHCOCK's
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

December, 1989 \$2.00 U.S./\$2.50 Can.



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GRASS,
ALAS**

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Over the
Garden Gate

by Debra
Wilson



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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Bouchercon XX, scheduled for the weekend of October 6 this year, will be upon us by the time most of you read this. We understand, at this writing, that the convention is fully booked, at least as far as attendance at the panels and other activities on the program is concerned, and hope that those of you who wanted to attend were able to do so (information about it was given in our May issue). In any case, though it may seem premature, it's apparently time to bring up the subject of Bouchercon XXI. That's right—the 1990 convention!

Bouchercon XXI will be something new. For the first time in the convention's history, it will be held outside the United States—specifically, in London. And plans are being

laid and reservations accepted. *The dates:* September 21 to 23, 1990. *The location:* King's College, London, on the banks of the Thames. *The cost of registration:* a full membership will be \$40 before December 31, 1989; \$55 thereafter. A supporting membership is available for \$25. Arrangements are being made for discounted hotel rates, and TWA has agreed to a ten percent discount on the thirty-day Apex fare.

For further details, write to Bouchercon XXI, Kings College, The Strand, London WC2, England. (Discounts on the hotel and airplane fare are only available through that office.) They can also explain about combining the convention with a more extended stay in England or Europe.

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(New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-795-3114.)

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Flamingos on the Grass, Alas



by Debra
Wilson

Miss Violet stopped her reading long enough to gaze out the window and see what all the fuss was about. Her sister, Emma-Claire, stood with her hands on her hips at the garden gate, giv-

ing the tenant what-for at the top of her lungs.

"I don't like your implications, young man, nor do I care for your tone of voice! And I especially don't like the fact that you seem to have forgotten who

owns the house you occupy!"

Mr. Dunn, the unfortunate tenant, stood captive in front of Emma-Claire, his mouth hanging open but not uttering a sound. There are no sounds to utter in such situations, of course, so Mr. Dunn was doing precisely what was in order, but it was obvious to anyone gazing out her parlor window at him that he hated the whole circumstance.

"Need I remind you that you are responsible to us, and not the other way around? We are too busy with our own affairs to be looking after you!" Having said this, she turned on her heel and strode, nose pointing at the sun, up the walk and into her house.

Emma-Claire didn't see the spark come into Mr. Dunn's eye just then. Miss Violet didn't see it either, because by this time she had turned her attention back to her book. But it was there.

Miss Violet tried to go on with her reading, but her sister's ranting and pacing would not allow it. Finally she marked her place and closed the book on her lap.

"They've gotten ruder and ruder over the years," Emma-Claire was saying, "but by far, this young man is the worst."

"Oh, I don't know," said Miss Violet. "I rather think Mr.

McKensie in 1977 was the worst, with all his loud parties and psycho music."

"Disco music," corrected Emma-Claire, "and I tell you he was nothing compared to the fine one we have in there now. Why, just outside there at the gate he called me a criminal."

"He didn't!" gasped Miss Violet. "In how many words?"

"Well, not in so many," Emma-Claire admitted, "but it was implied."

"Oh, how I hate implications," said Miss Violet.

"Then you must hate this one because he's full of them. He thinks someone's been in his cottage. He claims he's found his things disturbed, and he asked had we seen anyone lurking about. The nerve! I was tempted to invite him in to search our house to prove that we have none of his things."

"We haven't any of his things, have we?"

"Of course not! What would we want with his second-hand store furnishings? So I suggested to him that perhaps the cat had moved things around and do you know what he said? He said he didn't have a cat."

"I don't believe he does," said Miss Violet.

"He does too," Emma-Claire insisted. "That big marmalade cat with the missing ear. I've seen it over there."

"That's a stray," said Miss

Violet. "That cat was coming around weeks before Mr. Dunn moved in."

"He feeds it, else it wouldn't be over there all the time," said Emma-Claire. "Who knows, it may have been sent on ahead. You read stories like that all the time."

"No, you don't," said Miss Violet. "You read stories about animals finding their way back to places, not ahead to places. What you just said doesn't make any sense."

"Oh, now don't you start with me, too," Emma-Claire warned. "I'm telling you that young man insinuated I'd been snooping at his things. Then he asks me to keep an eye out for 'suspicious persons.' Ha! I'm his 'suspicious person.' I'm the one he suspects."

"Perhaps he'll give us notice, then," said Miss Violet.

"And he can take his ugly cat with him, too," said Emma-Claire, glaring out the window at the little cottage on the other side of the garden gate. "We don't need any stray cats left behind to feed."

"I don't believe it's his cat," said Miss Violet.

"And I," said Emma-Claire, "don't believe for one minute that he's even thinking about moving out."

Miss Violet picked up her book again. "Hmm," she said.

To demonstrate how upsetting Mr. Dunn had been, Emma-Claire spent the rest of the morning lying down in the parlor with a cold damp cloth on her head. Miss Violet did her best to ignore her, keeping to her book, but by noon she was tired of reading and feared she might suffer permanent nerve damage if she didn't stand up soon. Emma-Claire was pretty much played out too, annoyed that her sister would let her lie there like that and not offer any sympathy. Besides, Emma-Claire wanted to get back to pruning her rose bushes, the labor that Mr. Dunn had interrupted, before any more of the day was wasted.

Both women stood at the same time and, since they were up, decided to have some lunch. Miss Violet made tuna sandwiches and Emma-Claire poured two tall glasses of iced tea. They sat across from each other at their gingham-covered kitchen table.

"Is this oil or water tuna?" asked Emma-Claire.

"Water," said Miss Violet.

"Are you sure?"

"It was in the blue can. You stood here and watched me make it."

"It tastes like oil tuna."

"It isn't." Miss Violet was about to get up and retrieve the

can from the trash when the sound of Mr. Dunn's Toyota tearing down the street caused them both to look out the window.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Miss Violet.

"Where's he off to like that?" Emma-Claire frowned at the trail of dust that followed the little blue car around the bend in the road. "Like a maniac. Just like a maniac."

"There's no excuse for—" Miss Violet began, but Emma-Claire reached across the table and squeezed her hand.

"An absolute maniac," she said, "living on our own property!"

"Oh, dear," said Miss Violet. She took a sip of her iced tea, and eyed her sister suspiciously. "Why didn't you use the good tea?" she asked.

"Oh, pooh," said Emma-Claire. "We have bigger fish to fry."

Mr. Dunn was no maniac, but he was mad. Someone had been in his home, rented or not, and he knew why.

They just don't have enough to do, he thought to himself as he drove to the Ben Franklin store in town. And of course he was right. True, they had their house and rose garden, but sometimes that wasn't enough. That's why they found them-

selves watching out their window for him to leave for work, and that's why they found themselves sneaking over to his cottage, hoping to find something interesting to talk about.

If they need something to talk about, he reasoned, then the least I can do is oblige them. I too may be old and bored out of my skull one day, and I know *I'd* certainly want someone to oblige *me*.

He bought what he needed and left quickly, for he was now a man with a mission. His return home was just as furious as his departure, and he noted with pleasure the curtain movement in the ladies' parlor window as he slammed the car door.

Emma-Claire watched him toss plastic pink flamingo lawn ornaments out of his trunk. He made them into a little mob scene, crowded together near the front door of his cottage. Then he leaned back, thumbs in his belt loops, admiring his work.

Some of the birds had their heads to the ground as if eating, and others had their necks stretched high, as if watching down the road for the mailman. Two crazy-looking birds were scrunched up, their necks in an S shape, one leg bent to take a step, heads cocked slightly to

one side. Their eyes were large and panic-stricken. Mr. Dunn liked these two best.

"I believe I'll call you Bruce and Iggy," he said out loud, and laughed.

Now even if Emma-Claire had heard him right, this remark would have meant nothing. Bruce and Iggy were friends he knew in school, and their stories are not important here. But Emma-Claire, for all her straining her ears at the window, had heard wrong. Nonetheless, she hurried into the kitchen, where Miss Violet was cleaning strawberries, to make her report.

"He's worse than we feared," she said. "He's talking to the lawn ornaments."

"He hasn't any lawn ornaments."

"He has now. He just set them up. A flock of flamingos. And he says to them—" But it was too much for her, she'd upset herself right out of breath. She stumbled into the table, clutching her hand to her throat.

"Oh, here," said Miss Violet, taking her sister a glass of water. "Calm down."

Emma-Claire took the glass and drank, then sat breathing hard and shaking her head with her eyes shut.

"Good gravy, Emma-Claire, you're so worked up. So he got some lawn ornaments. What's

so terrible about that?"

"But he's talking to them!" she exclaimed.

"Now, maybe you didn't hear right," Miss Violet suggested.

"Stop defending him. Who else would he be talking to?"

"He could have been speaking to the cat."

"He was talking to the lawn ornaments, I tell you. He looked right at them and said, 'You're a goose and you're a piggy,' and then he laughed like a lunatic."

"Oh, dear," said Miss Violet, her hands back in the strawberries again. "You don't mean he's put plastic pigs and geese on his lawn?"

"No, they're flamingos. Get your hands out of those silly strawberries and come see for yourself."

The ladies went to their parlor window and watched Mr. Dunn take a sack of birdseed out of his car. He walked into the center of his flock, scattering seed at their feet. "Here, chick-chick-chick-chick," he called. "Here, chickies."

"There, you see?" asked Emma-Claire, steadying herself on the windowsill. "He's gone off the deep end."

"Oh my."

"I just hope there's room enough in the cellar. We'll have to go down and start making things ready."

"As if we didn't have enough

to do," sighed Miss Violet, and set off to find their sweaters. It was always chilly in the cellar, even in the summertime.

Mr. Dunn stored the sack of birdseed in the carport and, smirking uncontrollably, took the last Ben Franklin bag into his house. This was turning out to be more fun than he had expected. Later, when he thought the ladies were asleep in their beds, he took the package of colored eggs out of the bag. Quietly he slipped outside and hid the eggs around in the grass near the flamingos. Then he moved the birds around just a little.

"Nobody's gonna say I raise lazy birds," he chuckled, and went inside to bed.

The ladies, however, were not asleep. Miss Violet was making hot cocoa for herself, and Emma-Claire, in the cellar, was digging another deep hole in the dirt floor. They didn't see the changes in the yard display until the next morning when they watched Mr. Dunn leave for work.

"He thinks he's quite the jester," Emma-Claire remarked as he drove down the road.

"He's inventive," said Miss Violet. "You must give him that."

"Inventive?" echoed Emma-Claire. "Foolish is what. I won't

have us made a mockery in our own home."

"That's what you've always said," Miss Violet agreed. "That's what we've always held onto."

"And we won't stop now. Some things must always remain or the battle is lost. We'll end up in a home somewhere and die of bedsores."

Miss Violet moved away from the window. "Don't say that."

"Well, this is how it starts, you know. Let them start laughing at you, and your life is over."

Miss Violet sat down on the davenport and folded her hands in her lap. "Such a lot of work," she sighed.

"Well worth it," Emma-Claire reminded her.

"I just don't like this."

"Who does? Life is full of unpleasanties, Violet. You must deal with them."

"But it's been years since we've dealt with this. What if we haven't the strength? What if we fall and break a hip?"

"Don't talk to me about hips," snapped Emma-Claire. "Fine time to worry about hips, with a maniac living right in our own back yard."

"I suppose," said Miss Violet, but she was not convinced.

"You let me do the planning."

"I'll see to breakfast then," said Miss Violet.

"Yes, good idea. We'll need to keep up our strength for the next few days."

Miss Violet got out the frying pans for bacon and eggs, but couldn't keep her mind on cooking. She knew that this time her sister was leading them to disaster, but what could she do? Emma-Claire was beyond reason, especially when she had her heart set on burying someone in the cellar.

Still, this wasn't like before. This wasn't a drifter, or a drug dealer, or a prostitute. This one had a car, and a job, and certainly a family somewhere. He paid taxes, wrote letters, and fed a stray cat.

No, thought Miss Violet, this time it wasn't going to work. There were too many loose ends with which they could hang themselves. She could think of only one solution.

"I hope you're using the real butter," Emma-Claire said as Miss Violet was fixing the toast.

"Of course I am," Miss Violet lied, bringing their plates to the table. Emma-Claire was so caught up in plotting Mr. Dunn's departure she didn't even realize she was eating margarine.

"I've decided what to put it in," Emma-Claire announced, dabbing the corner of her mouth with her napkin.

"Oh?" Miss Violet stirred a spoonful of sugar into her tea.

"Yes. Frosting."

"And make him a cake?"

Emma-Claire rolled her eyes. "Of course not. Men don't eat cake. They don't bother with a knife and fork and plate. Men want something they can eat with their fingers, and wipe their hands on their pants. I'll make him some cupcakes."

Miss Violet raised an eyebrow, impressed. "That's very clever."

"I know about these things," said Emma-Claire. "He'd let a cake get stale and throw it out. That's how men are."

Miss Violet was afraid that Emma-Claire was going to brag again about how much she knew about men, but Emma-Claire let it go. Miss Violet was thankful for that, because she hated the superior air her sister took on just because she'd been married once and Miss Violet never had. She'd smile mysteriously, as if she were sitting on some big secret.

Emma-Claire really didn't have any secrets from Miss Violet, though. She'd told her things she'd told no one else, things she'd long since put so far out of her mind it was as if they'd never happened. Things like: Emma-Claire's marriage was terrible. She was sixteen. He was thirty-one, a slick, thin-lipped, smooth-talking lingerie salesman. He bought her out-

rageous costumes and made her act out different stories in them every night. When she didn't get them right, he got mean; sometimes, even if he'd been pleased, he'd get mean just for the hell of it. He tore off part of her ear once with a belt buckle. Knocked her down the stairs another time and caused her to lose the baby neither one knew they had. After that, Emma-Claire couldn't get pregnant, and he held that against her as if she'd planned it all.

It wasn't long before he began bringing his mistress home. The two of them carried on right in front of Emma-Claire, and laughed in her face.

One day, when they were in a particularly bad humor, they decided to play a game of house-keeping. They ransacked one room after another, forcing Emma-Claire to clean up each mess they made. They tied a pair of heavy workboots around her neck and threw liquor in her face. They burned her with cigarettes and made her mop up spills with her hair. All this time they were drinking, and when they moved to the basement and started ruining the canned goods, they ran out of brandy and sent Emma-Claire upstairs for more. Instead of bringing a bottle, she ran straight for the revolver and hurried back down the cellar

steps. And when her husband and his mistress looked up from dumping peach preserves on the floor, Emma-Claire shot them both several times in their heads.

When the two were never seen again, everyone assumed that they'd run off to Mexico together, since the whole town knew that to be their plan. Out of respect for Emma-Claire, no one questioned her much about it. Only Emma-Claire and Miss Violet knew the real whereabouts of the couple. They were five feet under the meat freezer in the cellar.

At first, Emma-Claire had lost sleep worrying about being found out, but as the years passed she stopped worrying. Fifteen years later, when she bought the freezer, she didn't think twice about installing it over the grave. The freezer installer suggested the spot because it was where the floor was the most level. The cement slab he put down pleased her, too.

"Chocolate, I think," said Emma-Claire. "Or maybe red devil's-food."

"Oh, dear," said Miss Violet. "I'll have to put it on our order, and the boy doesn't come until Thursday. Unless you want to call it in special?"

"It can wait until Thursday. The hole won't be ready before then, anyway. And we don't

want to raise any suspicions with special orders."

"I suppose not." Miss Violet took another bite of her eggs and decided she wasn't hungry any more. "I don't think I'll be able to finish," she said of her breakfast.

"I'll have it, then," said Emma-Claire, taking the plate. "I've worked up an appetite. I'm surprised at what a job this is, it's been so long." She smiled, and Miss Violet realized how much her sister was enjoying herself.

"Don't wear yourself out," Miss Violet cautioned.

"I know how to pace," Emma-Claire assured her. "Anyway, it will be amusing to see what sorts of tricks Mr. Dunn will perform for us between now and Thursday."

"Yes," agreed Miss Violet, rising to carry her cup and saucer to the sink. "That will be amusing."

The ladies were not disappointed. For the next three evenings, Mr. Dunn scattered birdseed for his plastic flamingos, talking to them, singing to them, complimenting them on their egg-laying. Late at night he'd quietly rearrange them.

Tuesday evening Emma-Claire walked out and stood at the edge of the yard. Mr. Dunn

saw her out of the corner of his eyes and began singing loudly: "With a chick chick here and a chick chick there, here a chick, there a chick, everywhere a —"

"You've gone mad, haven't you?" asked Emma-Claire.

"Oh?" Mr. Dunn exclaimed, turning to face her, his hand in the bag of birdseed. "You gave me a fright. I didn't see you there."

"Don't give me that. Why are you pretending to feed these birds every night?"

"And you said you were too busy to notice what's going on over here," said Mr. Dunn.

"Oh, you are funny." Emma-Claire folded her arms across her chest.

"Funny?" echoed Mr. Dunn. "I don't know what's so funny about taking care of my animals. And I'm not pretending. This is *real* seed." He held out a handful. "See?"

Emma-Claire didn't look at it. "I suppose they really eat it, too."

"Well, it just doesn't disappear under the ground, you know." He scattered the seed in his hand and rolled the bag closed.

"The crows come and eat it," said Emma-Claire.

"Now how would you know that?" asked Mr. Dunn, smiling. "Surely someone as busy as

yourself hasn't time to be peeking out from behind her damn lace curtains at what's happening over here."

Emma-Claire glared back at him, the corners of her mouth slowly turning up into a sardonic grin. "No, Mr. Dunn, you're right. I am far too busy." She left then to look for her muffin tins.

Mr. Dunn went into his cottage to look for clothes for the flamingos. The next morning the birds were wearing neckties and standing shoulder to shoulder, facing the ladies' parlor window.

By Thursday morning the birds had advanced across the yard. The two crazy scrunched ones stood together at the edge of the property, as though discussing how to storm the garden gate.

Mr. Dunn came out and got in his car. As he backed out into the road he shouted to the birds: "That's right, boys, stand your ground! Keep your eyes open! I'll be back 'fore sundown!" And he drove away, laughing. The neckties fluttered in the breeze.

At noon the delivery boy brought the groceries. Emma-Claire started to work on the cupcakes while Miss Violet put the food away.

"I didn't order rat poison," said Emma-Claire, cracking

eggs into the batter, "since we've still got some downstairs. I hope it's good."

"I can't imagine its going bad," said Miss Violet.

"Me either." Emma-Claire sat down with the bowl and started to beat the batter.

Miss Violet sat down across from her and put the cupcake papers in the tins. "Won't it be strange to offer a gift after all that's been going on?"

Emma-Claire smiled, shaking her head. "Oh, Violet," she sighed. "I can see what a mess you'd make of this. Of course I can't just hand him a gift. He'd feed it to those damn birds right in front of me. This must be your part."

"Me?" gasped Miss Violet.

"Yes, you," said Emma-Claire, spooning the batter into the paper cups. "I can't do everything."

"Yes, I know," agreed Miss Violet, and smiled, for she had just gotten an idea.

"All right, then. You'll take him the cupcakes tonight as a peace offering. Tell him all this bickering is driving up your blood pressure, and you're afraid if it doesn't stop you'll keel over and die. You know, poor-little-old-lady stuff like that. Tell him you think he's a good boy. He'll eat one right then if you say that, just to act like a good boy." Emma-Claire carried the

tray to the oven and slid it in.

"Mind the time," said Miss Violet.

Emma-Claire set the timer on the stove, then took another bowl to make the frosting. "The hole still isn't deep enough. I'll have to put more time into it this afternoon."

Miss Violet took the batter bowl to the sink and turned on the water. "Such a lot of work," she said.

Mr. Dunn came home around six o'clock. He got out of his car carrying a large wicker basket on his arm and, after loudly greeting the flamingos, he set to gathering eggs.

Emma-Claire moved away from the window. "I'll be glad not to look at that any more," she said.

Miss Violet sat in her favorite chair, reading. "Yes," she agreed.

Emma-Claire stared for a moment at her sister. "Yes? Yes, then all I'll look at will be you, you and your books."

"Yes," Miss Violet said again, not looking up.

Emma-Claire brought six cupcakes from the kitchen, arranged on a pretty blue plate. "If you would be so kind," she said.

Miss Violet set her book on the end table and stood,

straightening her dress. "Do you think this is the right time? He hasn't even had time to start his dinner."

"All the better," said Emma-Claire, putting the plate in Miss Violet's hands. "He'll gobble up all of these at once. Now go, I've got to finish things in the cellar."

Miss Violet knocked gently on the front door, going over in her mind what she planned to say.

"Why, Miss Violet!" said Mr. Dunn, opening the door. "Is it Girl Scout cupcake season so soon?"

"No, Mr. Dunn, these are—"

"Oh, of course I'll buy some," Mr. Dunn boomed, ushering her into the house and shutting the door. "Come right in, I'll fetch my billfold."

"Please stop, Mr. Dunn. I've brought a peace offering."

"A peace offering?" asked Mr. Dunn, in mock surprise. "I didn't even know there was a war."

"Please, Mr. Dunn, just stop a minute." Miss Violet began to tremble. "I can't bear this any longer. It's upset both of us so in the past week that I honestly don't know—" She stopped, attempting to regain her composure.

Seeing now how upset Miss Violet was, Mr. Dunn dropped his comedy act and became gen-

uinely concerned. "Oh, there, Miss Violet—I'm sorry! I had no idea!"

"Please, where can I put these?" Her hands were shaking, holding out the plate.

"Right through there, on the kitchen table," Mr. Dunn said. He followed her into the next room. "Really, this is very kind of you—" And as he was saying this, the plate slipped out of Miss Violet's hands and landed upside-down on the floor.

"Oh, my Lord!" gasped Miss Violet, putting her hand over her face. "Look what I've done."

"That's all right, that's all right." Mr. Dunn pulled out a kitchen chair. "Sit down, it's okay. I'll take care of it."

Miss Violet sat down and stared at the mess on the floor. "They're ruined."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Dunn, putting them back on the plate. "Just a little dirt is all."

"No!" Miss Violet insisted. "Throw them away, they're ruined!"

"They've just lost a little of the topping—"

"I said throw them away." Miss Violet's voice quivered.

"Well, all right. But it does seem a shame—"

"Dump the whole lot in the sink and grind them up in the disposal," Miss Violet ordered. "I can't bear this any longer."

In a few minutes it was

cleaned up and Mr. Dunn sat down at the table with Miss Violet. She was more at ease now.

"You must think I'm a fool," she said, bowing her head in shame.

"No. No, I don't," Mr. Dunn said gently. "I never meant to upset you."

"Please don't tell my sister about the cakes. She's had so much on her mind, what with the trip and all."

"Trip?" asked Mr. Dunn.

"She didn't tell you? Well, of course, you two haven't had much conversation lately—"

And again Mr. Dunn felt ashamed.

"Yes," Miss Violet continued, "her health has been failing, so she's going to spend some time with her girlfriend in Arizona. She's a widow too, her friend in Arizona, and she'll be glad for the company. That's why she wanted to make peace now. After all, I'll be all alone over in the house. I know she'd feel better if we were friends."

Mr. Dunn took her hand and patted it. "You tell her to rest easy, then," he said. "We're friends."

"Thank you, Mr. Dunn," Miss Violet smiled, almost blushing. She took her hand back and let it rest in her lap.

"How long will she be gone?"

Miss Violet looked down at

her hands and sighed, full of sadness. "I can't say."

"Is anything wrong?"

"She's already discussed making this a permanent arrangement," she confessed, "and it frightens me. How will I manage all by myself?"

"I'll be right here," Mr. Dunn offered.

Miss Violet shook her head. "I couldn't impose. You have your own life."

"I'd be happy to help out."

"You don't need to burden yourself."

"You'd be no burden."

"I won't take charity," Miss Violet declared. "However," and she brightened when she said this, as if the thought had just dawned, "we could work out an exchange. You could do odd jobs around the house and keep this little place for free. Then it would be like I was paying you."

Mr. Dunn smiled. "When will your sister be leaving?"

"Tomorrow," Miss Violet said, and stood to leave. "I should be helping her get ready."

Mr. Dunn saw her to the door. "You tell her not to worry about a thing," he said. "We'll be fine."

"Thank you, Mr. Dunn," said Miss Violet, and started back to her house.

"And tell her I said the cupcakes were delicious!" he called after her.

Emma-Claire heard her sister come in the front door. "I'm down here," she called from the cellar.

Miss Violet stood at the top of the stairs, looking down. "All finished?"

"Yes, come and see."

Miss Violet held onto the handrail and carefully descended the stairs. Emma-Claire stood in the center of the floor, bathed in the lunatic glare of a hanging lightbulb. Three large piles of dirt surrounded the deep hole in the floor. Miss Violet reached the bottom step and took hold of the shovel that was propped against the cellar wall.

"I was afraid I'd never get it deep enough," said Emma-Claire, hands on her hips, smiling proudly down into the grave, "but I measured it and it's exactly—"

The shovel blow to the back of her head cut short her last words, and Emma-Claire fell face down into the pit. The shovel flew back on the floor, but Miss Violet snatched it up right away and began heaving dirt on top of her sister. She didn't stop until Emma-Claire was completely covered; then she staggered back to the steps and sat down, shaking violently.

She sat there in a timeless stretch of night, rocking and heaving, unaware of the strange

sobbing and crackling noises she was making. Suddenly her eyes focused on the hole in the floor, and she scrambled to finish her work.

By the time she made her way to the top of the stairs again, the sun was shining through the kitchen windows, and Mr. Dunn was driving down the road towards town. Miss Violet noticed none of it, walking straight to the bathroom for a shower. Afterwards, she put her clothes in the washer and went to bed. Around four P.M. she awoke and transferred her clothes to the dryer, then put some chicken in the oven for dinner. She set the timer and sat down in her favorite chair by the window with her book.

Shortly after five P.M., Miss Violet looked outside and smiled at the sight of the little blue car coming up the road, as if her son were coming home on the school bus. She was happy being in her own home, her dinner almost ready, her clothes clean, and her sister in Arizona.

Epilogue (or Life Goes On): Humming merrily, Miss Violet searched the boxes in her closet for the one marked EASTER. Finding it, she took out a pink basket and filled it with yellow cellophane straw. She nestled a few fluffy toy chicks in the straw and smiled.

Mr. Dunn was in the yard removing the neckties from the flamingos when Miss Violet came up the walk with her pink basket.

"Good evening, Miss Violet," he said.

"Good evening, Mr. Dunn," she replied. "I have the most wonderful news. The flamingo eggs have hatched!" And she held out the basket to show him the toy chicks.

Mr. Dunn laughed, delighted to see the old lady in such a gay mood. "Oh, Miss Violet," he said, "you are indeed a priceless, rare gem."

Miss Violet laughed along with him, blushing ever so slightly.

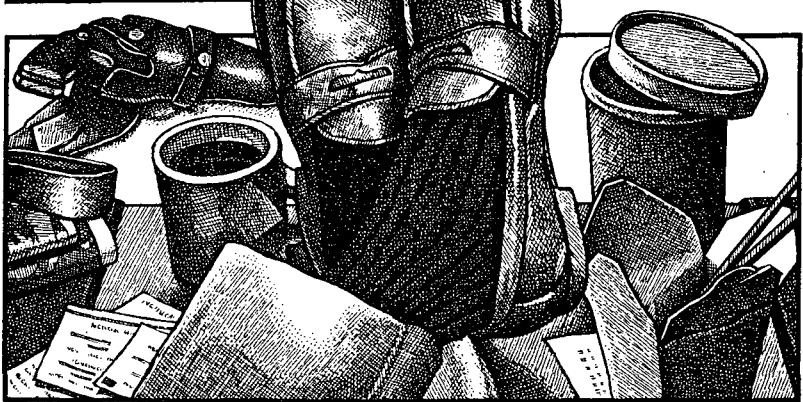
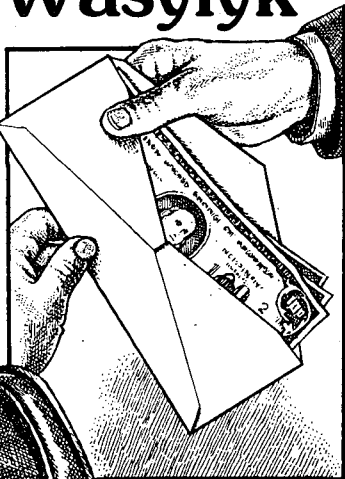
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Career _____ _____ Choice

by Stephen Wasylyk



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Feet propped on his desk, hands locked behind his head, Nolan Bryce stared out his office window at the building across the street where the weather-worn bricks were etched sharply by the October brilliance of the morning sun.

Reflection was supposedly good for the soul, but his mind, wandering in and out of corridors of memory, failed to show him exactly where he'd gone wrong during the past fifteen years.

Agnes Scopa's voice came over the intercom with all the resonance of a talking robot.

"Bernie Oldham is on one."

Nolan swung his feet to the floor. If he had stiffed someone for five hundred dollars, he'd never have given the man an opportunity to express his opinion of his antecedents and character, but a self-made millionaire like Bernie felt no guilt or shame, which was how he accumulated money the way a dark blue blazer accumulates lint.

He picked up the phone gingerly, forefinger extended. The scratch along its length wasn't deep, but the torn flesh stung just enough to be annoying when the finger flexed.

"Go to hell, Bernie."

"What was that for?"

"The down payment on five hundred dollars' worth of in-

sults. I still have four hundred and ninety-nine to go."

"You're still complaining about that lousy five hundred? If that's the way you feel, I'll give you cash up front this time. You've got to help me out, buddy."

When Bernie offered cash and talked buddy, he was in real trouble.

"I'll listen, but I don't promise anything."

"I can take you to court, you know. I consider you responsible for what happened here last night."

"What happened there last night?"

"Someone broke into the plant and stole five of the—"

Bernie hesitated, looking for a substitute for a word he wasn't allowed to use.

"Call them widgets, Bernie. The Defense Department can't object to that."

"Okay, widgets. And since you not only recommended the people who installed the security system but supervised it all—"

Nolan chuckled. "Go ahead and sue. Those people are recognized as the best in the business, and the system was approved after installation. The judge will also be interested to learn you made a few changes without notifying anyone."

"All right, all right. So maybe

I made a mistake, but I figure if we can get those widgets back real fast, the FBI guy here won't recommend taking the contract away."

"It couldn't happen to a nicer guy."

"No more jokes, Nolan. This is serious."

"I'm not joking. You arbitrarily knock five hundred dollars off my bill and expect compassion?"

"What's the big deal? Business is business."

Nolan let that sink in for a moment.

"You're right. That's why if I come out there and look around, you hand me twenty-five hundred in cash the moment I walk through the door."

"Are you crazy? I was thinking more like a couple hundred!"

"Then let the FBI handle it. They won't send you a bill. Why bring me in anyway? They won't like it, and chasing spies isn't my business."

"What spies? I think someone stole them just to make a few bucks and since you know all the people who buy stolen merchandise—Dammit Nolan, why are you giving me a hard time? I thought we were friends."

"Of course we are, Bernie, but that only applies to having dinner together or going to an Eagles game. We're talking business here. Right?"

Bernie's voice was pained. "I'll have the money ready."

"It'd better be. I'll see you in half an hour."

Agnes's flying fingers paused above the Selectric keyboard when he walked into the reception room.

"Don't let that sleaze ball stiff us again."

Free from the electronic distortion of the intercom, her voice was one of those jokes that life plays: husky and sexy, conjuring up visions that had no connection with a middle-aged woman with the proportions and silhouette of a steel drum and short, straight gray hair that appeared to be galvanized—just as her physical appearance had no connection with her excess of heart, intelligence, and loyalty. Her only flaw was that she often treated Nolan like an adult son who couldn't grasp the realities of life.

"Twenty-five hundred in cash up front," he said. "I don't even have to hit petty cash for expenses."

"That's nice because we don't have any. We're also down to two hundred in the checking account. The funeral almost cleaned us out."

Nolan smiled. "We could have saved on the—"

"I'm not complaining. He deserved to go in style."

He paused at the door. "Maybe we should consider closing up."

"Sure, Nolan. The business world is full of open doors for a forty-year-old private investigator and a fat, gray-haired old secretary with varicose veins." She jerked a thumb at the door and returned to her keys. "Go get the money."

The pleasant-faced, honey-haired young woman already on the elevator was wearing a tailored blue suit, a white blouse, and a polka-dotted silk scarf thrown loosely around her neck, the suit tastefully accenting everything in shape and form that Agnes had been denied.

She pulled her shoulder bag against her stomach protectively, her other hand subtly shifting on the handle of the black attaché case to convert it to an easily swung weapon.

Nolan smiled as he punched the ground floor button.

"Most of the women in this building prefer to put their backs to the wall, hold the case and bag in one hand, and make sure the brass knuckles are comfortable on the other."

Her glance out of the closing doors must have caught the name on the office door.

She smiled. "You're the detective I heard about?"

"I wasn't aware they were warning women about me."

"I'm sorry, but I didn't know who you were." Her voice turned defensive. "You don't look like a detective."

He touched his lip with a forefinger. "You just blew part of my cover. If I'm Nolan Bryce, private eye, who might you be?"

"Just call me Martha Mizinski, girl attorney."

"Ah. The Marvelous Miss Mizinski, former public defender and scourge of the D.A.'s office, now trying to make it on her own."

"What did I move into here? A low-rent nest of gossips?"

"We prefer to think of ourselves as one big support group."

He held the door open with one hand and ushered her out with the other. "Best wishes for success, but as my late Uncle Phil used to say, crime is a growth industry so you can't lose."

"Look," she said as they crossed the lobby, "if I offended you, I apologize, but you know women must be careful in elevators."

"Think nothing of it. You're speaking to the King of Offenders. In my time, I've offended everyone I've come in contact with, which is why I have no wife, mistress, or poker playing buddies. Even my mailman carefully folds everything marked Do Not Fold."

She paused before a late model

Toyota, telling him who had taken his parking spot that morning. "You could always reform."

"No chance. I like it this way. Give the system hell, counselor."

Fifty feet down the street, he climbed into a ten-year-old Chevrolet so leprous with rust, patches of red primer, and faded paint spots it should have been quarantined. The car looked like hell, but ran as smoothly as the day it left the showroom.

The air was so clear the sunlight must have hurt the eyes of William Penn, perched atop City Hall and probably pondering with sadness the changes time had brought to his Greene Countrie Towne; a few small, puffy clouds were aimlessly drifting across the city.

The clouds have nothing on me, thought Nolan—forty and pretty well locked into a career I have no interest in, don't care about, see no way out of, and which brings in just enough money to keep me from sleeping under cardboard in a Broad Street subway station.

He would bet there were enough like him to fill a book; *The American Male at Forty*. Sad tales of men who woke up one morning to realize they had taken a wrong turn somewhere and life ahead was a dusty road through a nightmarish moon-scape.

The chapter on him would be short.

The civilian demand for combat platoon sergeants when he left the army had been nonexistent, so Uncle Phil had said, "Come in with me. The way crime is going, there's more than enough work for both of us. You're big enough, smart enough, and ugly enough to take care of yourself, and you can have your license in a year. If something better comes along, you're gone."

Except that career opportunities didn't come along like buses, and if one had, he hadn't been standing on the corner. He'd been somewhere else in the middle of something he couldn't leave—and the siren song of the half-clad, buxom maiden on a rock luring sailors to self-destruction had nowhere near the attraction of a weekly paycheck in doing the same thing.

Seven years into it he'd been looking for the best way out when Uncle Phil was found in an alley one morning with his head bashed in, assailant or assailants unknown and never found in spite of all Nolan's efforts. When the hospital let Uncle Phil go after three operations, he was blind and paralyzed on one side and incapable of following his motto—do unto others four-fold what they have done unto you. The

medical insurance had long been used up, and the horrendous bills had to be paid with money from the agency.

All of the money from the agency.

He and Agnes had been living on starvation rations for a long time. The hurricane that had drenched them last week when they buried Uncle Phil had seemed entirely appropriate.

He left the expressway for a country road. A mile farther he pulled into the parking lot fronting a two story brick building planted in the center of a one-time pasture for a dairy herd—a yellow wart on the green landscape exacerbated by the ten foot high wire fence topped with barbed wire forming an enclosure at one side.

As always, reluctance glued his feet to the floor after he'd parked.

What the hell am I doing here?

Earning a living.

I don't want to go in.

Okay. If you skip town quickly enough, the creditors won't find you, and when Agnes's unemployment runs out she can go on welfare.

He pushed the door open. He'd always hoped that someday the voice in his head would say, *You don't have to. Go to New Zealand and become a sheep grower.*

It never did.

The receptionist handed him a visitor's badge. A wide-shouldered guard in a gray uniform escorted him to Bernie's office on the second floor; an air-conditioned, softly lighted, deeply carpeted windowless cave that could have been a mile underground instead of located among rolling hills where the leaves were forming splashes of color amid the green.

Nolan wondered if architects who designed buildings without windows could be arrested.

Grayhaired, tanned from a summer of sailing, and bulging a little at the waist, Bernie was behind the desk, two men seated before him.

The young one with the mandatory overabundance of hair, designer jeans, and glorified sneakers was Bernie, Jr. The one in the business suit was trim and slim, with a bony face and gray eyes. He had to be the FBI guy Bernie had mentioned. FBI guys always seemed to have gray eyes.

Bernie rose. "Thanks for coming, Nolan."

Nolan held out his hand, palm up. "No thanks are necessary. The money is."

"I thought you were joking."

Nolan lifted the hand in a goodbye gesture and stepped toward the door. "So long, Bernie."

"All right, all right." Bernie

irritably pulled an envelope from his center drawer and dropped it on the desk.

Nolan fanned through the hundred dollar bills, making sure there were twenty-five. When it came to dispensing his own money, Bernie often didn't count too well.

Bernie Jr.'s glare matched his father's, but the man with the gray eyes smiled.

"Rather good pay."

Nolan slipped the envelope into his coat pocket. "Not really when you consider I don't have a wealthy uncle handing me a pretty green check every two weeks."

The man chuckled and held out his hand. "Floyd Mooney." He turned to Bernie. "You'll forgive me, Mr. Oldham, if I take Mr. Bryce down to the cafeteria and buy him a cup of coffee."

Bernie's face sagged. "I wanted to explain—"

"I'll do that," said Mooney smoothly.

Bernie glared at Nolan. "Fine, just so long as Mr. Bryce remembers who he's working for."

Descending to the lobby, Mooney asked, "Do you really want coffee?"

"No," said Nolan. "I was establishing the atmosphere of interpersonal warmth so dear to the hearts of psychologists."

Mooney grinned. "Good. I've

never tasted coffee that bad in my life."

"Bernie probably made a deal with the caterer to use sawdust, floor sweepings, and chicory."

"I wish he had. Any of those could only have improved the taste. Let's walk around outside. A day like this shouldn't be wasted."

Nolan glanced at him. That might be true, but it wasn't the reason he wanted him outdoors. He pushed the door open.

"Is the next step to point at my car and tell me to get lost?"

"No. We can talk more freely outside. When Oldham said you were on your way out, I made a phone call. I was told you're quite good."

"People have been known to have bad judgment."

Mooney grinned again. "How much did Oldham tell you?"

Nolan paused at the head of the short flight of brick steps. If an artist could have captured the brilliant colors the sun brought out in the rural landscape, he'd have become forever famous with just one painting.

"Only that there was a break-in and several of the widgets he's manufacturing were stolen."

"Widgets? You don't know what they are?"

"No, and I don't want to. He called me a year ago and told me he'd landed a government

contract under one of those let's-spread-the-gravy-around-to-small-business uproars, but he needed an approved security system installed. I told him to hire a security firm and let them handle it, but he's paranoid about people he doesn't know. Thinks they're all out to rip him off. He asked me to select a firm and supervise the installation. I did. We gave him the latest in state-of-the-art equipment and backed it with three shifts of two guards. He almost had a heart attack when he saw the cost. When I billed him for my time, he cut five hundred from the bill. That's why I wanted cash."

Mooney nodded. "I understand. How does he expect you to earn it?"

"He thinks that if I recover the widgets before you do, you'll take it easy on him with that willful negligence clause in the contract and not recommend cancellation."

Hands in his pockets, Mooney put his head back, closed his eyes, and breathed deep, giving Nolan the feeling he'd rather be somewhere else.

"What's the prize for the right answers?" asked Nolan. "A tour of Washington, D.C.?"

"You may have heard that some of us don't look for help from local people. I'm not one of them."

"Anyone who appreciates a day like this can't be all bad."

They strolled slowly toward a vehicle gate in the wire fence.

"Let me give you the details."

Mooney's voice was casual. "The security people called the police and Oldham at one thirty last night when their board indicated an intruder. A patrol car was here in ten minutes. The men waited for Oldham, who arrived a half hour later. While waiting, one of the men found a tarpaulin draped over the fence at the rear, which indicated someone had climbed over. When Oldham let them in, they found the shipping platform door jimmied. The finished widgets, as you call them, are packed twenty to a carton. One was broken open and five were missing. Oldham called our emergency number. Two of us were here by six. My partner went back into town to drop the tarp at the lab and to pick up an investigative team. I'd like to have something worked out by the time he returns." Mooney's question, suddenly sharp, demanded an answer. "You supervised the security arrangements. What do you think?"

A gray uniformed guard nodded as they went through the gates. The enclosure held a half dozen cars, including Bernie's Mercedes. At the far end, a yellow cloth band tied to the fence

lay on the macadam in a huge semicircle, closing off the entire shipping platform.

"I think Bernie should never have cut the night guards to save money," said Nolan. "They were part of the deal because this is a half-rural, suburban township, with only two police cars on duty after midnight. Instead of the normal one-to-three minutes, the response time could be as high as twenty unless the adjoining township covered for them. I'm not surprised to hear it was ten." He waved. "Nothing deters like manpower, but he wanted to save on payroll so the fence was his no-wage substitute. All it did was draw attention to the place. And give you the justification you need if you want to recommend canceling the contract."

The shadow of the building held a slight October chill. Nolan moved out into the sun. The gate was to his left, the shipping platform indented into the end of the building to his right, the yellow wall before him appearing impregnable.

He leaned against the rear of the Mercedes and folded his arms, wincing as the scratched finger curled around a bicep.

"Problem with your hand?" asked Mooney.

Nolan displayed the finger. "If you look at my car, you'll see it has parts that are hazardous to touch."

Mooney shaded his eyes with one hand, amusement in his voice. "No Porsche?"

"I leave that to the flashy operators, just as I leave espionage and spies to novelists and your department. Those widgets may be top secret, but I find it hard to believe that whatever Bernie is making in that shop is so valuable that any self-respecting agent would drive all the way out here and go to a great deal of trouble to steal one, much less five. He'd be more likely to spend a few days thumbing through technical publications at the public library in the city until he found what he was after. Hell, the way security in this country has been lately, the Kremlin probably had the engineering drawings before Bernie did."

Mooney smiled. "Letting him call you turns out to be one of my better decisions."

Nolan tapped the pocket with the money. "For me, at least. I don't see how you benefit."

"We seem to agree that the motive for the theft wasn't to acquire classified material."

Nolan shrugged. "I was thinking of an enterprising freelance driving by and assuming that a place tucked away like this, with a ten foot high fence around it, has to have something worth stealing inside. He checks it out, learns enough to make him curious, and breaks

in hoping he can make a killing. He finds nothing but those widgets. How big are they, anyway?"

"Not too big."

"Not too big. So he stuffs five in his pockets and gets the hell out. Do they have any commercial value?"

"None at all."

"Then by this time he's been turned down by every fence he knows in the city. If he's smart, he's thrown them away. If he isn't, he's still hoping to peddle them to somebody. Bernie is far from being a perfect human being, but he's intelligent enough to know that stolen merchandise is fenced, and that after fifteen years, I know who buys what in the city. That's why he thinks I can recover those widgets before you do."

Mooney's voice was colder than the shadow alongside the building. "I wouldn't like to think they were thrown away, Mr. Bryce. If they aren't recovered, Oldham is in more trouble than his attorneys can handle. Cancellation of the contract would be the least of it. However, we do disagree on the motive. Whatever it may be, I think it came from inside the building."

Even though he was standing in the sun, Nolan felt a chill. "I can't believe anyone in there had anything to do with it. I doubt if there's a person inside

who doesn't realize that if Bernie goes down, they go down with him."

"I'm looking for one who doesn't care. You know these people. Perhaps you can give me a candidate."

"I don't know everyone who works there."

"I'm not interested in everyone. I'm interested only in the four people knowledgeable about the security system, other than the guards, who could pass the information to someone on the outside."

Nolan shrugged. "You're talking about the four people who have most to lose and are least likely to have any motive at all."

"Interesting, isn't it?"

To him, but not to me, thought Nolan. People always had a way of going off at a tangent, of not doing what you expected them to do.

His mind went back to wondering what in the hell he was doing in this business. Uncle Phil had never mentioned that when you dealt with the seamiest side of people constantly, the odds were that some of it would eventually rub off on you.

A great deal had rubbed off on Uncle Phil, which was probably why he'd been found in that alley.

He couldn't take off for New Zealand, but as long as he was

here, he could control what he did and didn't do. He pushed away from the car.

"Mooney, one of the advantages of being an independent businessman is that you can say no once in a while. The only reason I came out here was to stick it to Bernie for holding back the five hundred. I really don't care who took the damned things, or why, or what happens to him because of it. All I intended to do was pocket the money and go through the motions. I find I can't do that. I help him or I get out of the picture, and since I have no desire to help the man at all, I'm getting out. Ever since I've known him, he's listened to no one and insisted on doing things his way, like getting rid of the guards. Maybe it's time his ego was cut out from under him."

He pulled the envelope from his pocket, extracted five of the bills, and held it out to Mooney.

"He and I are now even. If you don't mind, give this to him and tell him I have other things to do. In appreciation, I'll give you a rundown on your four people. Nothing that you couldn't find out for yourself, but it'll save you some time."

Mooney took the envelope, his face impassive. "You have a deal."

They slowly walked toward Nolan's car.

"Bernie is no different from dozens you've run into already. Since he made his money the old fashioned way, by cheating and stepping on others, he believes he's some sort of demigod. That's the good side of his character. The bad side is that if he saw any way to make a profit in stealing his own products, he'd do it, but obviously there's none. Those widgets are worth money to him only when delivered, and he wouldn't jeopardize that unless someone deposited a huge sum in a Swiss bank account in his name."

Mooney nodded. "I'll buy that."

"Bernie Jr. has more hair than brains. He earned his degree by selecting courses taught by professors dumber than he is. I think he majored in statistical analysis, and since no statistical analysis can be proved right or wrong, he couldn't fail. He spends his time at a computer terminal analyzing everything except what is important to the business. On the face of it, it would be impossible for him to steal your widgets because he'd spend five years analyzing the effect of the theft on everything from the national birth rate to the impact on the ozone layer. But you never know because Bernie achieved the pinnacle common to every money-obsessed father

since time began. His kid hates his guts."

"Ah," said Mooney. "And Mildred Weaver?"

"She's the equivalent of the battery in a quartz watch. Without her, Bernie might as well close down. She handles all the money and the books, and she was his mistress before his wife was killed in an automobile accident and his mistress since. She hopes that someday he'll get around to marrying her. If she decided that he wasn't going to, she'd be capable of stealing the widgets just to get him into trouble; on the other hand, she doesn't have to do anything that drastic. She can turn him into a quivering blob of jelly simply by thumbing her nose at him and walking out, but you might look into the status of the relationship."

Mooney glanced at him. "You're a fountain of knowledge, aren't you?"

Nolan shrugged. "If we're talking aphorisms, I'll give you another. When you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas. As far as your last suspect is concerned, you can forget Wally Craig."

"As production supervisor, he has free access to the shop."

"True, but when you talk to him, remember him. He's one of a diminishing band of people. He's completely honest."

Nolan opened his car door.

"Where did you hurt your hand?"

Nolan pointed to a rust-created jagged edge on the jamb.

Mooney half smiled. "Let's hope it taught you to be more careful."

"Any more questions? If not, I'm gone."

Mooney tapped the envelope on the back of his hand reflectively.

"You still believe someone came in over the fence just on the possibility of finding something valuable to steal."

"Unless you can shoot it down."

"Time," said Mooney.

"Time?"

"Time. As a former army man, you know that time is one of the critical factors in mounting a raid. You must get in, get what you're after, and get out before the enemy arrives. The same principle applies to breaching a security system, no matter how sophisticated. Even though Oldham eliminated the guards, the man had a minimum of ten minutes and a maximum of twenty to get in and get out, which isn't enough time to explore." Mooney shook his head. "No way. He'd have to know what he was after before he made a move."

Nolan leaned on the roof of his car. At the edge of the mac-

adam, a tall maple glowed in the sun with a yellow luminescence. Now that Bernie's ugly building had broken the ice, others would follow and the magnificent maple would be gone. The bastard should hang, but you can't punish a man for being stupid.

"Not necessarily," he said. "There are a helluva lot of men out there willing to gamble ten or fifteen minutes of their time on the possibility they'll score big. Good luck. I hope you get your widgets back."

"So do I," said Mooney dryly. "I'm scheduled for a vacation next week and I don't want to leave this unfinished."

Nolan watched him enter the building. Bernie would be speechless at the thought of anyone's turning down money. Maybe he should have handed it to him himself. His career hadn't had too many highlights.

Martha Mizinski hadn't grabbed the parking spot yet. Nolan jockeyed into it. It was her turn to park down the block.

He placed the five bills on Agnes's desk.

She pushed each of them with a forefinger as if they were contaminated. "I see he did it to you again. You said twenty-five hundred."

"I turned the job down, so I kept only what he owed us."

Unwilling to let it go at that, she padded after him. "Turning down jobs is a luxury we can't afford. The idea was to stick it to Oldham and have him pay for it."

Nolan settled in his chair. "Oh, he's stuck all right. Mooney, the FBI man, is convinced it was an inside job. Bernie has more trouble than he can handle."

"Since we need the money, couldn't you have gone through the motions?"

"And keep tripping over my principles?"

"Where did *those* suddenly come from? Your Uncle Phil would have been proud of you for coming up with the idea of breaking in, holding up Oldham for a fat fee, and supposedly recovering those widgets from an unidentified source in a no-questions-asked deal. Now that you've taken yourself out of the investigation, how do you return them without getting burned?"

Do unto others four-fold what they have done unto you. Bernie had once mentioned the widgets were worth five hundred each. That meant one for the money he'd been shortchanged and four as a kind of usurious interest. Sure, Uncle Phil would have been proud of that kind of creative thinking, but he wasn't Uncle Phil.

He grinned. "Trust me."

"Trust you? *Trust you?* After I thought you were out working hard to keep us from going broke? Where the hell were you, anyway?"

"It was such a nice day, I drove out and had lunch at the Stratford Arms."

"Ah. The Stratford Arms. Judy. I swear, Nolan, I don't know what's to become of you. Out romancing that bimbo instead of—"

The phone chirped. She stomped to her office to answer it and called through the open door, her voice suddenly concerned. "Agent Mooney."

Knowing she was still on the line, Nolan cradled the phone against his ear.

"Think of another question?"

"None is necessary. A pickup man for the post office found the five widgets in a paper bag in a collection box a few miles away. Since the postal inspectors had no idea what they were, they called us. I thought you'd like to know you were right. Whoever stole them must have realized they were worthless to him and dropped them into the box."

"You're lucky. As I said, he could have thrown them away."

"Somehow I think that never entered his mind," said Mooney slowly.

"What happens to Oldham?"

"Don't ever say we don't look out for the taxpayer. Taking the contract away would cost us more than it's worth. By laying down a few rules and keeping a close eye on him, we make him spend the money."

"And the thief?"

Mooney took so long to answer, Nolan thought the connection had been broken.

"He isn't as important as recovering the widgets, but I told you I was going on vacation. If it rains, I'll be thinking that if it wasn't for this Oldham thing, I could have gone this week and that might make me irritable enough to go looking for him anyway."

"You don't have much to go on."

"I could come up with something. I didn't tell you we found a little blood on one of the barbs at the top of the fence that poked through the tarp. I guess you know about all the wonderful things the labs can do with blood these days. As good as a fingerprint. If I want him, finding him wouldn't be too much of a problem."

Nolan took a deep breath.

"Then I'm sure he hopes the sun shines upon you and the winds are gentle. I enjoyed our little talk. When I file my quarterly tax return, I'll feel better knowing part of it will go to you."

Nolan cradled the phone and stared at it thoughtfully. As an alternative career, theft was definitely out.

Agnes appeared in the doorway.

"Nolan, sometimes you show flashes of brilliance. I just wish you could convert them into money."

Martha Mizinski appeared behind her.

"May I come in?"

"As long as you're not asking for a donation to one of the bar association's charities," said Agnes.

"I can't afford those either. I ran into something where I need a little investigative help. Your usual rates, of course."

"Sit down," said Agnes. "Make yourself comfortable. Put your feet up if you like. Can I get you anything? Coffee? Tea? Perrier? A pillow?"

"What kind of investigative help?" asked Nolan.

"I have a client accused of murder. He says he's innocent and I believe him."

"Never handled a murder investigation that wasn't messy," said Nolan. "I've decided I don't do murders."

Agnes's hands hit her hips. "NOLAN!"

Miss Mizinski stiffened. "I'm sorry. I came to you because several people told me you wouldn't cut any corners, that

I could go to court with anything you turned up without worrying about being hung up to dry by the prosecution, but I can easily call someone else."

"Oh, he's just joking," said Agnes. "You won't find anyone better than Nolan. He just helped the government recover some stolen material." She leaned forward slightly, eyes gleaming. "You *were* joking, Nolan."

Nolan chuckled at the thought of the story on the six o'clock news—"... and today, a secretary was being held in custody for pitching her employer, a private investigator, from a third floor window. Her attorney, Martha Mizinski..."

"Just trying to retain my title as the King of Offenders," he said. "In the pursuit of justice for your client, I'll be happy to work with you hand in hand, side by side, night and day—"

"Don't get carried away," said Miss Mizinski. "Side by side at night isn't part of the deal."

"Whatever. Will this be check, American Express, Visa, or MasterCard?"

Miss Mizinski sat down and unzipped her bag. "Cash."

Agnes sighed. "No wonder they call you Marvelous Martha." She massaged the bills between thumb and forefinger to make sure they were genuine before glaring at Nolan.

"Can't you say thank you to the nice lady?"

There had to be a balance in the infinite scheme of things. If he hadn't spent the last fifteen years the way he had, he wouldn't be sitting here across the desk from Miss Mizinski—one of the finest assemblies of feminine structural components he'd ever seen, wrapped in the fragrance of an exotic perfume and topped by a mind

the envy of the legal community—a combination that led to all sorts of speculative possibilities with a few unbelievable fantasies thrown in.

Which all might come to nothing but, on the whole, sure beat the hell out of a dream of trailing a herd of smelly, bleating sheep down a rocky trail in New Zealand.

He smiled. "Thank you, nice lady."

(continued from page 3)

Finally, the Bouchercon committee is conducting a mystery play competition, sponsored by a professional London theatrical management company, Claire Fox and Brian Kirk, Ltd. The prizes are £1000, £500, and £250, and the winning play will be professionally performed at the convention. Entry forms are available from the Bouchercon office.

And speaking of competitions . . . St. Martin's Press has announced a new manuscript contest. You may remember that for several years St. Martin's and the Private Eye Writers of America have jointly sponsored a contest for a private eye novel. To that, St. Martin's has recently added a contest

for a "cosy" or "companionable crime" novel. The deadline is very near, too near, probably, for most of us: manuscripts must be postmarked by November 1, 1989, but if you just happen to have been working on something . . . If not, we can hope that St. Martin's will continue the contest next year. Anyone can enter who hasn't previously published such a novel or doesn't have one under contract with a publisher. For the contest rules, write to Malice Domestic Contest, St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10010. The prize is a \$10,000 advance on a contract with St. Martin's and publication by St. Martin's in the United States and Macmillan in the United Kingdom.

FICTION

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Inconsiderable
□□□□□□ Person □□□□□□

by Ann F. Woodward



There was a woman known as the Lady of the Sixth Ward. So notorious was she that, though dozens of ladies lived in that ward, even the poorest laborer in the city would know who was meant by the name. Her father had been a lesser prince, and when he died, the income from all his sustenance households had been hers. So in earlier days she was known for wealth and fine lineage and, more discreetly, for beauty and taste. Even the slightest note written in her distinctive calligraphy had raised the standing of the man who could manage to leave it lying about so that his friends would see it. Visits to her mansion had been so competitive that her suitors had urged their retainers to elaborate systems of spying on each other, and only the most tactful and strong-willed of ladies, needed for the escorting, delaying, or deflecting of all these visitors, had been equal to service as her ladies-in-waiting.

Finally choosing, she married. And he died during the epidemic of the next year. After that there were, all at the same time, many devoted men who kept an eye out for each other as they approached her house, but who believed in her secret love for himself alone.

The first of these to marry was the first to feel the strength of her jealousy. Every bitter reproach of abandonment was used against him, the most pitiful references to tear-dewed sleeves, the tenderest poetic metaphors of solitariness, the loudest tirades of accusation, the subtlest threats of self-destruction, the most melting forgiveness, the sultriest glances in the full light of the lantern. Very soon it was known that, not abandoning his mistress, the man had abandoned his wife and was seldom seen at her father's house where she still lived.

People talked. The lady's means had been extreme; he should not have given in to her, she should not have forced him, her spirit was too strong, harm would come of it. The wife would fall sick, wait and see. And others should be careful.

Yet the men married, one by one, some keeping up the appearance of a lingering love, some breaking with her and trembling at their courage, some genuinely affectionate to the end of their days, some careful and conciliating, some—and as time went by, more and more—blaming her for the deaths of children and wives, for seizure by her reaching, envious, malevolent spirit. Now she lived in her splendid mansion in vengeful isolation, barely able to keep servants and gardeners because she was so demanding, and because of the stigma of any connection with her household.

All this Lady Aoi thought of as she prepared with impatient resignation to go to the Sixth Ward and see the lady through an illness. The prince whose principal wife Aoi served as lady-in-waiting had made a special trip to ask for her help, arriving after dark and causing the princess to hide a bitter smile behind her fan when she found that he had not come to stay the night but was passing on to the house of another of his wives.

"You have always obliged me, Lady Aoi," he said, "by your monthly visits to take her my little remembrances. More than that, your company has been almost her only connection with the world in recent years. She does not deserve . . ." He stopped in puzzlement, wondering if she had really done all that was attributed to her. People who had never been associated with the Lady of the Sixth Ward often died, young and old, for little or no evident reason. But Aoi knew that there had been cases among the lady's former acquaintances, or in their families, of possession by an evil spirit that, when exorcised by the priests, had spoken through the medium in the voice of the Lady of the Sixth Ward, and that had sometimes caused great suffering and even death. Like the prince, Aoi could not entirely disbelieve in the strength of spirits.

Aoi did not like the Lady of the Sixth Ward, no matter that she visited her once a month on behalf of the prince and made herself pleasant for the sake of doing kindness to a fellow human being. At the time of each visit, Aoi's carriage driver would have to pound on the gate for long minutes before sullen servants, suspecting harassment, would open it. Then, "Ah, it's only you" was the invariable greeting she received from the lady herself. And far from wanting news of the world, the lady wanted audience for her grievances, which she recited in a low voice of deadly resentment—the tradesmen who were rude to her people, the neighbors who persecuted her, the artisans on her manors who did shoddy work, the decline of standards, the lack of manners in the young (though how she knew anything of present-day standards or the habits of young people, Aoi could not guess), and always the neglect of old friends.

In spite of her duty to the prince and her willingness to do whatever he asked, Aoi found that her movements took on the abruptness of controlled irritation as her thoughts grew sourer and sourer. She summoned her maid O-hana and told her to pack clothes for a few days, being sure to include the little chest of medicines. These instructions were given in a voice so unlike her usual slow and melodious speech that O-hana wondered what was wrong, under-

standing when she was told their destination. She did as she was asked, as dulled and leaden as her mistress. The two of them went with the prince in his carriage as far as the house of his other wife, where he dismounted. Then the carriage took them on south through the dark streets to the Sixth Ward. It was the end of the Ninth Month, the weather still warm and the night still alive with the hum of insects.

When they arrived, the outrunners began such a raucous calling and knocking that the gate was pushed open a crack almost right away and a frightened servant stuck out his head.

"What is taking you so long?" the prince's men yelled at him, though actually their noise had brought the man almost instantly. "Don't you know we are bringing help for your lady?"

"Help?" the man said.

"Help is such a rare thing here that he doesn't—" Aoi coughed inside the carriage. Trained to pay attention to this small sound used universally by ladies to preface entrance into a room or an intention to speak, the men instantly stopped their badgering and turned toward the carriage. She put out her fan under the bamboo blind and motioned one of them to come close to the rear gate. It would not be necessary to unyoke the ox and pull the carriage inside, she said. She and O-hana would get down here and walk through the courtyard. "And please don't make any more disturbance," she said, "it will attract attention in the street. Help us out and then return to the prince. Tell him I will send news as soon as I know . . ." She brushed out her arm in a movement full of impatience with the whole mission and did not finish the sentence.

Just inside the door of the mansion of the Lady of the Sixth Ward, all warmth and pleasantness of the air stopped, replaced by the dry chill that always characterized these rooms, no matter what the weather, no matter that shutters were raised to sweet outside breezes. Maintained in perfect order by the drive of the lady's pride, every surface clean and polished, the furnishings either rare antiques or the finest and most stylish of modern make, with great spaces stretching into the distance, the house breathed the cold of incomplete occupation, endlessly empty of throngs who never came. Usually also it was silent, made even more so by the occasional rustlings and bumps of hidden and unwilling servants.

A maid came to meet them and led them along a corridor toward the lady's room. Aoi was surprised to hear, as she approached, the light, soothing voice of a girl. When she was admitted, it was by

a young woman she had never seen before who knelt beside the door and slid open one panel in its track, murmuring her name and welcoming Aoi and O-hana with lilting phrases inappropriate to the situation, as if they had been merely social visitors. Perhaps she was not aware that the lady's estate manager had sent a message to the prince that his mistress was ill.

"Please enter. I am Minbu, it is my honor to serve here. We meet for the first time, I hope you will look upon me with favor. It is a happy thing that you have come. The prince sent word that we should expect you." Her speech came in nervous little bursts, she alternately smiled, wrinkled her brow in puzzlement, or put on a look of grave concern, so that there was never one clear expression on her face for long at a time.

She was stocky and had a look of country strength, though her speech was refined and her accent entirely that of the capital. Her robes were of almost startlingly good quality and hung a little long, so that Aoi thought the lady had given them to her from her great store of fine silks. In her hand she held prayer beads strung with crystal, gold, onyx, and jade.

Aoi's repressed anger rose a little. She passed beyond the kneeling girl and entered the curtained platform where the bedpads were laid out on straw mats. The Lady of the Sixth Ward lay wasted and immobile. Long ago her beauty had hardened into a sort of grim handsomeness, but now even that was completely destroyed by emaciation. She was covered with a thin robe, her hair, long and thick and still very black, had been bound with ribbons. Her skin was of an unhealthy gray color and tight across the cheekbones, her eyes so deep in their sockets as to give her face the appearance of a skull. Aoi was shocked into sympathy and the immediate urge to help. She had not realized the seriousness of the lady's illness. Motioning O-hana to come with her, she knelt beside the bed and reached for the sick woman's wrist to feel her pulse.

Her skin was dry and cool, the pulse in her wrist weak. Feeling Aoi's hand on her arm, the lady roused and turned to see who it was. "Ah, it's you," she said, just as she usually said it, disappointed that it was not someone better. But then she turned her hand to grasp Aoi's fingers. She knew Aoi's skills in diagnosis and massage, her knowledge of medicines.

"What is this that troubles you?" Aoi said.

"It is the season of the Great Yin and I am oppressed by it. I have always been a woman to have an excess of yin and sometimes . . ."

She stopped speaking and seemed to drift into sleep. Her voice had been slurred.

Aoi turned to Minbu. "How long has she been like this?"

As soon as she felt Aoi's attention, the girl, who had been sitting quietly to one side, began her smiles and lilting speech. "I don't know," she said, with intonation as sweet as if she were reporting the blooming of a lily. But then she groped for what to say and a look of fright replaced the social face. "Since I have been here . . .," and she lost her breath, ". . . she is not much changed since I came here. She has always been quiet and she likes her sleep." Now she was indulgent, smiling again, excusing her naughty mistress, who liked to nap in the daytime.

Aoi could not contain her irritation with this frivolity, the lady lying beside them almost comatose, and she framed her next question combatively. "What have you been giving her to eat?"

Before the girl could answer, the lady roused again and spoke to Aoi.

"Don't accuse her. Minbu has taken over everything and she . . ." Taking small breaths, she finished in a fading tone, ". . . She makes me very happy."

Aoi was holding her fingers on the pulse at the throat and finding it weak there too. As the lady was about to slip back into sleep, she touched her apologetically on the temple and looked into her eyes when they opened again, saying as she made her examination, "We must find out what is making you so terribly sick."

"I will not have you blaming Minbu," the lady whispered. Aoi glanced at the girl, who had retreated and now sat quietly in the shadows beyond the light of the lantern, her hands busy with the prayer beads, which clicked as they swayed back and forth. Her expression was anxious but changed at once to smiles when she caught Aoi's eye. "She has come to stay with me," the lady paused, savoring all the meanings of this, "to find servants, to bring my food. I have taught her to prepare my medicine."

Aoi knew this medicine, which was opium. Though she could not be sure, Aoi believed her use of it had begun not as treatment or for relief of pain, but for pleasure. Brought into the capital by illegal dealers, it was probably supplied to the house by some shadowy man from the western city, where crime of every kind was hidden and where the police feared to go.

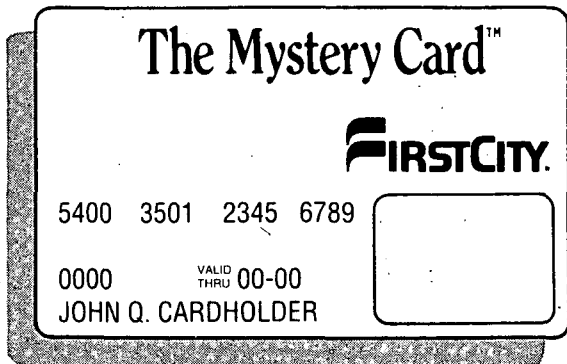
"Minbu is a relative then?"

"Yes, relative. She came . . ." Seemingly too lethargic and dim

Mystery

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in her mind for connected speech, she stretched her hand out along the floor toward Minbu, who moved into the light, her actions abrupt as she advanced on her knees, the prayer beads clattering and swinging on the floorboards, catching around the legs of a low table as she passed. Then with a smile that seemed stiff and unpracticed and that disappeared so quickly Aoi was not sure she had seen it, the lady said, "She has become . . . my friend." Minbu's expression was now even more confused between pleasure, alarm, and what seemed to Aoi to be fear.

Just at this time O-hana arrived with the medicine chest and some hot water. Aoi mixed finely powdered rhubarb root and dried ginger to open all internal passages, added realgar in case there was poison present, cardamom to increase the breath and strengthen the mind, and some gum from the Persian black pod to clear the stomach. As she selected these from the small drawers and packets in the medicine box and worked them into a pill, she had O-hana keep the lady awake by holding her slightly upright on her lap and encouraging her to continue talking. Sips of the warm water freshened her and she recovered some of her usual animosity toward the world.

"It is spirits you should blame for this," the lady said. "Everyone hates me, do you think I don't know that? But I have been too strong for them, I have never let them near me. And I have my defenses." It took a long time for her to say this, and the low dragging quality of her voice, the heavy stare of her half-open, very black eyes made Aoi draw her robes more closely about her arms, which involuntarily wound across her waist in a protective motion.

They gave her the pill and O-hana did all the little things for comfort of the bedridden that Aoi had taught her. While they waited for the benefits of the medicine, Aoi asked Minbu about the more intimate and unpleasant details of the illness, which Minbu would not relate in the presence of the lady but took Aoi off into a corner to speak of. In the dim light, her teeth gleamed as she smiled over even such manifestations of sickness.

Far into the night they sat with her, until finally her breathing strengthened and her sleep seemed more natural. Leaving Minbu to keep watch from another pallet at the end of the sleeping platform, Aoi and O-hana followed a grumbling servant to the room prepared for them.

In the morning O-hana went to the kitchen herself for Aoi's

breakfast tray. "That girl is a marvel," she said when she returned. "The kitchen is fully staffed, they are all up early, and the rice is fresh. Look at this beautiful soup." The poor quality of the food offered Aoi on her visits here had been a joke between them for a long time.

"And our patient? Did you see Minbu herself?"

"Oh yes, she is up too, busy grinding something in a mortar, off in a separate room I passed. She says the lady is awake and asking for her medicine."

"Ah yes, her medicine. That continues, does it?"

O-hana did not answer. With such medicine, they both knew, there was no stopping. Leaving her breakfast, Aoi hurried to the lady's room but found her in a coma, lying with eyes half-closed, still and gaunt amid the silks of the elaborately furnished sleeping platform.

The servants reported that a crowd had gathered in the street, having heard the the lady was ill. Aoi had the shutters lowered for privacy, but the people in the street remained. Because no family members had come, the duty of sending for priests fell to Aoi. Their prayers and chanting made an accompaniment to all that followed.

Aoi involved herself intimately in the nursing, tending the lady's every physical need. She found that there was little she could do, the lady could not be roused, and just as the night became dark, in the middle of the Hour of the Dog, she slipped from coma into death. In spite of herself, Aoi felt frightened to think of that spirit at large in the house, and she grasped O-hana's hand for courage. Minbu sat frantically saying her beads, which seemed to be unusually noisy on their threads of silk. Looking more closely, Aoi could see that several beads were missing from one section and that the sounds came from their sliding on this length of empty cord. The crowd of priests was told what had happened, and instead of stopping their prayers, the drone of voices increased in volume. They too feared the lady's spirit.

No one wept. It had not been that kind of death.

Was it imagination or did the warmth of the Ninth Month now enter the room from the garden beyond the shutters? Looking at O-hana, Aoi felt that she too had noticed a difference. For no reason, her anger came back; she looked about her at the beautiful fittings of the platform, and with anger at the body of their owner, which lay straight and covered but which insulted the grace of its sur-

roundings because of that spirit—never satisfied, iron to others, willful, bitter, seeking.

Aoi wanted to go home, to return to the familiar routines of the princess's house, to greet visitors, exchange gossip, admire the new clothes the prince might wear if he came, make jokes to cheer her often-despondent mistress, unpack a new order of Chinese paper, receive notes from the empress or from the scholar who had recently been very attentive, grind ink and write a return note, step into her garden plot and gather herbs for next year's medicines, sit in her room and read the *Nei Ching*, retire at night on her bedpads with the familiar scent. All the little businesses of daily life had suddenly a piercing sweetness for her. But she could not yet leave this barren house. Something gritty in the fluid losses of the stricken lady troubled her. There was a problem here which she must solve. It made her angry that she could not leave it and go back to her life.

Finally someone who said he represented the family came and took charge of arrangements. He brushed Minbu aside, seeming not to know her at all, and indicated politely that Aoi's help was not required.

O-hana expected that now they would leave, retire to a shrine to purify themselves of contact with death, and return to the house of the princess. But, refusing the lantern a serving maid brought and leaving the shutters open to the light of the late-rising moon, Aoi sat stubbornly in the dark of a back corner of their room where she could not hear so clearly the noise of the crowd pushing into the grounds, all strangers to this house whether family or not. O-hana could only sit nearby and wait until she was wanted. It was Aoi's habit to analyze a problem by talking with her maid, who was sensible and observant.

"They will steal everything. When we go out in the morning the house will be bare, the garden will be trampled," Aoi said finally, motioning to O-hana, who moved to sit nearer, too modest to take the cushion indicated. Disturbed by her thoughts, Aoi shifted to one side, then to the other, still angry. "I do not like this death. But I begin to see. You said she was grinding something. I wonder why."

Peering into the darkness, Aoi flashed open her fan and clapped it shut, prodding her maid to answer.

O-hana shrugged. "She was preparing the medicine, I think."

"But opium is soft, you cannot grind it." She was silent for a

while. Then, "She is hard to read, this one, several persons seem to peer through her eyes in succession."

"Remember that she has lived her life pleasing others, she has had no family with whom she could be herself."

"Yes." Aoi was not disturbed by her maid's understanding of the effects of service, which O-hana performed with dignity and Aoi accepted in the same spirit. "But I do not like grinding, there is only one sense to it. There are beads missing from her prayer strand, you see." Resolution made her soft, her voice purred. "We will have it directly from her. Go and find her."

It took O-hana some time before she discovered Minbu crouched alone in a dark room, not sleeping, not even lying down. She brought her by force of character and by the borrowed authority of her mistress to Aoi's room. Once there, the girl began her litany of politenesses but Aoi cut her off.

"I do not know why you did it, but you have caused the death of the Lady of the Sixth Ward."

Even in the dark, Minbu's shock could be felt, as could her defiance which followed after. "She was a bad woman, it is good that she died?" In spite of her vehement tone, her voice rose, making the positive statement a question.

"It is for you to say who is bad, who is to die? This is a thing one person can decide for another? You would disturb the karma of the world with your own violent act?"

"You don't know what she has done to me," the girl answered with passion. "I should have been like she was, raised in the house of a prince. But she sent her spirit against my mother and the prince abandoned us. I was born to be given away, to live almost as a servant in the house of strangers, denied by my father, though better off than my poor mother because the strangers were high-born." She was out of breath, leaning forward, infused with earnestness. "I have heard the story all my life, I have hated her all my life."

"Um." Then turning mild, Aoi asked the next question. "Why are there crystals missing from your prayer beads?"

Confused, the girl answered in half-sentences. "Not crystal, they are only glass . . . They shatter when they hit things . . . I must be clumsy, I . . ."

"But they are all missing from the same section. If it were accidental, wouldn't they break here and there?"

"I . . . They break, they just . . ."

Aoi spoke again, "What were you grinding, this morning?"

The girl did not answer.

"My maid saw you grinding something. I want to know what it was."

She stammered out that she always ground dried orange peel, to flavor the medicine, that the lady had liked it that way.

"And something else," Aoi said. "These last few days you added something else." And with sudden strength of voice, "Do you think I am stupid? Or that I am blind? Do you think I do not know . . . *ground glass* . . . when I see it in a sick woman's emissions? You broke off your beads, ground them as well as you could, and embedded the chips of glass in the opium. She would swallow it and never know. And you thought it would kill her, to have ground glass in her stomach. The stomach is a versatile organ, it has strong yang and can protect itself against even that. The wad of glass chips would do her no harm, strange as that may seem. But yes, you have killed her—with opium, too much opium. Adding the glass, you needed to make a larger pill, and so you have killed her twice over."

Minbu broke down then, bending over her knees and pleading. "I am only an inconsiderable person, I am nothing in the world. But I have been able to do this one thing, to remove a wicked woman."

"You speak as if this were achievement. What you have done is to kill. You have killed a woman who was kind to you and trusted you, who said you made her happy, a thing she had said to very few people in her bitter life. You are, as you say, nothing in the world."

She turned to O-hana, "Go and find a guard," and she was weary, weary.

FICTION

The Girl and the Gator

by
**Robert
Halsted**

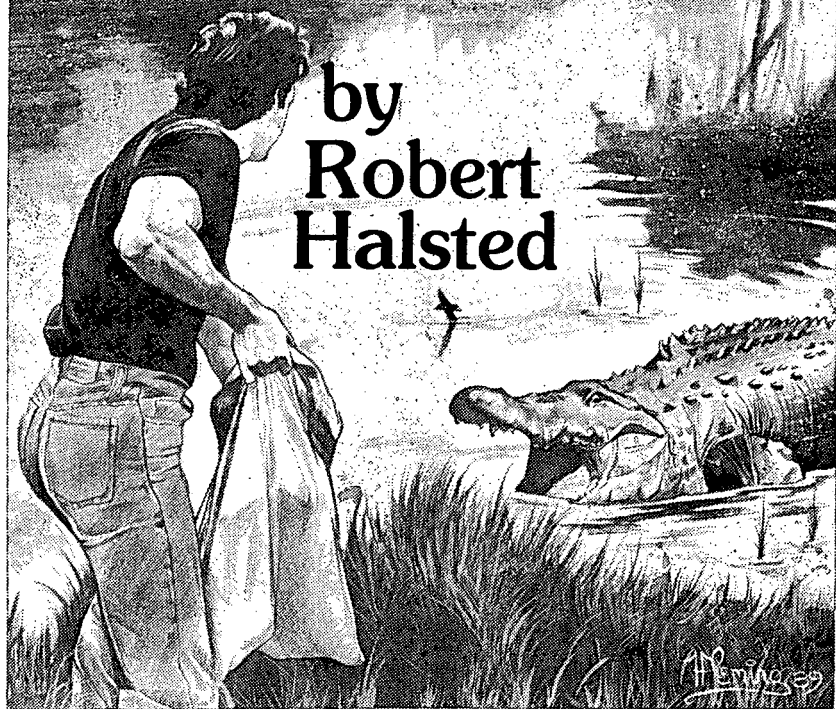


Illustration by Thomas Fleming

47
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I was at the quarry pit pond, mostly birding, though I had a cane pole line in the water.

Once in a while the float would bob, and once in a long while there was a bluegill on the hook, but the dry season sun was high and the fish were in no bigger hurry than I was. So mostly I was standing under a grove of cabbage palms, sweeping the shoreline with my little cheap bird binoculars, not much more than opera glasses.

The float went under, bobbed again, and I let the glasses dangle from my neck while I set the hook. I brought in a nice little panfish, enough for a lunch, and put it with the others in the ice chest on the back seat.

It is possible to live on Social Security, even taking early retirement for health reasons, if you're prudent and have been prudent earlier. My grandniece Sylvia says that my Virgo sun with Taurus rising makes me extra prudent, and occasionally calls me a stick-in-the-mud. But when my nephew and his wife broke up, she appreciated the stability I represented. She is one of the few people from back home who bothers staying in touch with me since I retired.

But even with prudence, the fishing helps. It provides a couple of meals a week, hours of entertainment, and friendly relations with my neighbors and their cat at a nominal outlay.

And Sylvia, the only heir I'm inclined to acknowledge, will pocket the savings. I hope she allows herself a moment of amusement at the results of my parsimony.

While I was putting the fish in, I took out a soda and was getting ready to lean back on one of the smoother palm trunks when I saw a flash of pink at the far, and shallow, end of the pond.

The pond mostly had steep banks where a dragline years ago had dragged out the fill dirt, pit shell, and coral rock, but one end had been left sloping for a loading ramp. That end was poor for fishing but good for shore birds.

I swung my glasses at where I had seen the pink, hoping for a flamingo. It was only a little flock of roseate spoonbills, but they are still beautiful birds so I stood watching them till the whole flock abruptly took wing. I slowly swung the glasses back and forth to see what had alarmed them, and saw a floating log proceeding far too rapidly for a floating log.

There was a resident gator in the pond, I had been told, but I'd never seen him before, nor wanted to. There is enough room in the National Parks to protect the species without encouraging them in inhabited areas. In the next county one had eaten half of a three-year-

old child a few months before.

This one was semi-tamed, the most treacherous kind. People would clap their hands and call, "Albert!," and he would swim up. Then they would toss him picnic leftovers, or marshmallows. Why people feed marshmallows to alligators, and why the gators eat them, I have no idea, but it's an old Florida custom.

With this kind of treatment the near-brainless reptile learns to associate people with food, and the next step is assuming that people themselves are food.

While I was thinking about this, I heard the clap and the call and swung my glasses around till I located the source. On the far side of the pond, two or three hundred yards from me, a car had pulled up off the shell road and there was a man standing on the bank. You can fish there, but I always come halfway around the pond on the sand road so I can fish undisturbed.

I tried to identify the man and the car so I would know whom to dislike the next time I saw him, but the cheap little birdglasses didn't have enough resolving power at that distance to make out a face or a license plate number.

As I watched, he reached into a sack, pulled something out and threw it to the gator. The beast swam toward it, went

glop!, and it was gone.

He did it a second time, the gator took it, and he was reaching in the sack for the third try when a skinny kid in shorts arrived, hell-for-leather, on a blue bicycle. From what I could see the child looked anywhere from nine or ten to early teens, but things being as they are these days I couldn't tell whether it was a boy or a girl.

There were words and gestures. The kid leapt off the bike and let it fall, ran to the man and pulled his arm. I heard their shouting a moment later, but couldn't make out any words.

Then the man shoved the kid in the chest with his free hand. The kid staggered back for about six feet, tripped on an Australian pine root, and fell on his, or her, back. The man made the third throw and stood there, watching the gator go for it.

I got a broadside view of the gator then; for a moment its tail and snout were both showing, and rather than the six feet or so I had estimated for it, it must have been a good eight or nine feet.

While he was watching, the kid got off the ground and ran at him with both arms straight out. The kid hit him in the small of the back and he took an awkward, windmilling belly dive into the quarry pit. By the time I heard the splash across

the pond, the gator was swimming over to investigate.

The child lost balance at the edge, slipped partly off and grabbed a tuft of heavy grass, and was just pulling himself or herself back onto the flat ground when the man swam up close enough to grab for a foot. The bank was maybe four feet high, almost sheer, and I knew there was nearly twenty feet of water under the man; if he got hold of the kid's foot, he might pull them both in, and there was no way of wading ashore from there.

When the kid saw the hand groping for his foot, he squirmed to one side, brought the foot down on the man's hand and wriggled up the bank onto flat ground, almost in a single motion. The man lost his little bit of headway and slipped back into deeper water.

Now the gator was only a few yards from the man. Its snout went down, it flipped its tail up, and went out of sight. A couple of seconds later I heard the man's scream—I may have heard, or more likely just imagined, a sort of shrill bubbling sound right at the end of it. My hearing is pretty good for my age, but I do have a slight tinnitus that makes me imagine highpitched sounds once in a while.

The last I saw of the man was

an arm, straight up, sinking into the water. The kid was squatting on the bank with his arms over his face.

This all happened faster than I can tell it. Probably the entire series of events took less than a minute from the time the child rode up on the bike.

I noticed the pain in my chest and arm then, and shuffled over to sit in the car. I practiced deep breathing, in through the nose and out through the mouth, while I unbuttoned my shirt pocket, unscrewed the little vial of nitro tablets, and put one under my tongue. It was about five minutes before my heart settled down enough for me to start the engine and drive away.

I drove carefully around the pond, streamers and moss under the live oaks brushing my windshield, until I got to where I had seen the . . . event occur. I stopped and walked over to the little clearing. The man's car was there, and the empty sack. I looked down at the quiet pond, and there was no man nor any part of a man, no swirl in the water showing that a gator had been there. There was nothing I could do, and of course never had been. I went back to my car and headed slowly up the shell road.

A short way up, around a bend and past a little thicket of scrub oaks, I saw the kid and

the bike. From here I could see it was a girl, maybe eleven or twelve.

She had her waist between the handlebar and the frame of the bike and was walking it along, holding both arms to her chest with one elbow on the handlebar. Every step she took, the handlebar would wobble and the pedal would hit her on the leg. She had a little trickle of blood running down the back of her calf where the sawtooth edge of the pedal had taken a bite.

This was a social occasion I didn't have a ready-made rule for. One thought that passed through my mind was that with my ticker acting dicky, as the British say, I was in no position to perform a citizen's arrest. Another was that it would be discourteous to drive by with the kid struggling along, leaving her to eat my dust.

I idled up alongside, blipped my horn, and said, "Can I give you a lift?"

She stopped and nodded silently. I got out of the car, took the bike and, stopping for breath a couple of times, got enough of it into the trunk for it not to fall out.

My vision blurred a little from the exertion, and when it cleared I got a closer look at the child. She was holding a kitten in each hand, clasping them to

her chest, and down each cheek was a pale muddy trail of tear-wet dust from the dry season shell road. She was trembling all over. Her face didn't look like the face of a murderess.

I drove her to a little cross-roads about a quarter mile up the shell road, where there was a cluster of houses down another shell road.

"You can let me out here, mister," she said to me. I stopped the car, let her out, unloaded the bike, and being careful with myself—the sun was almost overhead now, and it must have been nearly ninety—put it behind a thicket of peppertrees.

"You can take the kittens home and come back for the bike," I said.

She tried to smile, and said, "Thanks, mister."

"You're welcome." I was having a little trouble smiling, too. I felt like putting my hand on her sunbleached blonde head, but didn't know how she would take it. Men wipe out a lot more young girls than gators do. I hoped she knew a little—but not too much—about the Bundy case, which was coming to a head about then.

I had to take to my bed when I got home. I upped my blood pressure medicine, called the Senior Citizens Hotline (I wish they would just call us "old

codgers" and let it go at that), let the Meals on Wheels people feed me for a couple of days, and listened while the visiting nurse lectured me on fishing in the noonday sun. I let her think what she wanted to think. I had no intention of telling her the whole story.

I didn't pick up a paper nor watch the TV news for those couple of days, but when I was up and about I learned that they had found enough parts of the man in the pond to call out the state conservation people and have the gator taken care of. The girl I gave the ride to had been his stepdaughter.

I had had a lot of thinking time as I lay there pampering my dicky ticker. The world wasn't the same one I grew up in, kids weren't the same as I was at her age. And I wasn't the same either, I realized.

A time or two, before her mother moved the family away, I would see her in the village store or filling her tires at the gas station. We would smile and quickly turn away, not looking each other in the eye. I've wondered since how she's handling it as she grows up. I wanted to tell her I was sorry about the other three kittens, but figured it was better not to.

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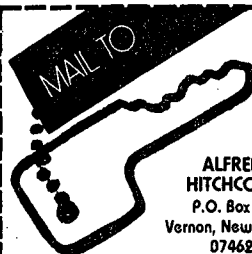
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The winning entry for the July Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

Augie and the Ketchup King

by Charles Peterson



The main processing plant for Kupperdinck's Ketchup stands amid gently rolling rural hills, now green with summer, and consists mostly of three large white buildings whose blank, single

story facades belie the activity within. This activity, somewhat simplified, involves tomatoes and spices rolling into Building A, presently to emerge from Building B in bottles containing that world-famous con-

diment. Meanwhile, money flows into the resulting vacuum at Building C, on top of which Karl K. Kupperdinck surveys his ruby realm from a penthouse suite.

Hardly anyone ever sees the interior of this penthouse suite, so it is a considerable surprise to me when, one afternoon, Mr. Kupperdinck's secretary, a sparsely assembled, desiccated man named Newton Smedley, appears at my bottle-capping machine in Building B and inquires, "Augie Augenblick?"

"The same," I reply, deftly removing from the line a bottle whose cap isn't fastened tightly enough to frustrate its ultimate purchaser.

"Mr. Kupperdinck wants to see you in the penthouse," says Smedley, with a sniff indicating his incomprehension of this example of executive bonhomie.

"Oh, ah!" I say, equally uncomprehending, as I follow Smedley onward through lines of bottling and labeling machines and upward to the top-most reaches of Building C.

I have never seen Karl Kupperdinck before, and I discover that there is so much of him that he nearly has to be viewed in installments—being clearly a man who has dined often and well over a protracted period and who, if he ever counted cal-

ories at all, usually stopped at ten or eleven. As we enter, he is gazing out of his picture window, and he very nearly eclipses it with his bulk. I get the impression that he is not so much tailored as upholstered, for he is wearing a sport jacket cut to the general pattern and proportions of a refreshment tent at a carnival, and when he turns to face us the effect is that of a captive balloon responding to a shift of wind.

"Ah, Augenblick," he growls, and waves a hand to Smedley in dismissal. "Get lost, Smedley."

Newton Smedley vanishes as though through a trapdoor, and Mr. Kupperdinck says, "Sid-down, Augenblick," after which there follows a long, disconcerting pause while he appears to be studying me closely, in the manner of an entomologist examining an unusual beetle. Is this a rare specimen never seen before, he seems to be thinking, or shall I bash it with a brick? Finally he refers to a folder on his desk.

"Been with us for eight months, I see."

"Eight months, five days, and six hours," I reply. "All of them quite stimulating."

"Humph!" Mr. Kupperdinck transfers his scrutiny to his fingernails. "Ever hear of Gilbert Pettibone?"

"No, sir."

"A nut," says Mr. K. "A filbert of the most advanced persuasion. But a genius in some ways. I gave him a job in the lab when I was just starting out, to help me with the Formula."

I didn't need to ask what Formula. There is only one, and Karl Kupperdinck is its keeper. Once a month he removes it from a vault in a bomb-proof room and, behind locked doors, brews from it the secret concoction which, added to ordinary ketchup and after suitable aging, turns it into something that causes the salivary glands of gastronomes the world over to roll up their sleeves and prepare to come out slugging.

"Had to get rid of him eventually," Mr. Kupperdinck goes on. "He kept coming up with stuff like elastic glass and self-dusting Venetian blinds and light bulbs that play tunes when lit. Not worth a nickel, any of 'em. Finally he went around telling people that he really invented the Formula. Had to can him, of course."

"Of course."

"So he went to live in a little burg down the pike called Goobers Junction, where he kept on with his goofy experiments. Well, he kicked off last year, and about six or eight months ago I started getting anyony-

mous letters, one or two a month. Here—"

He plucks a sheet of paper from the folder and hands it to me. I read aloud: "'Don't you wish you knew what Gilbert Pettibone was working on before he died? Something that would make your ketchup taste like swamp water, you big gas bag . . .'"

"You don't have to read it all," says Mr. Kupperdinck, austere. "Pack of damn' libels, anyhow. But they say to me that Pettibone managed, just before he died, to fulfill his big ambition, which was to create a sauce that would rival The Ketchup. Well, I want it. And you're going to get it for me." There is a flinty quality to his voice as he adds, "Kit."

I start like a whale who, lolling in the tropical sea, is suddenly aroused by a harpoon in the gizzard. "What was that?"

Mr. Kupperdinck's eyebrows twitch. "You aren't about to deny that you were once known professionally as Kit the Cat Burglar? Newton Smedley tells me you were supposed to be tops in the business."

"But that was before four to six with time off for good behavior," I protest. "I am now officially retired. I have hung up my sneakers. I don't do up-per story windows any more."

"I understand Pettibone's

property—including his laboratory—has been inherited by his niece, a spinster schoolteacher named Augusta Pettibone." Mr. K. proceeds, ignoring me. "So far she hasn't managed to peddle the estate, so chances are Pettibone's recipe is somewhere on the premises. I suggest you take up residence in Goobers Junction and get acquainted."

"Just a cast-iron minute! I haven't agreed—"

"You can report directly to me—and as there are spies everywhere we'd better use some code names, just in case."

"You mean like Dun and Bradstreet?" I seem to have trouble getting through to Mr. Kupperdinck.

"That's been used."

"Abercrombie and Fitch?"

"Too fancy."

"Gallagher and Shean?"

"Too Irish."

"Gilbert and Sullivan?"

"Tell you what," says Mr. K., coming to an executive decision. "I'll be Ike and you be Mike. Now, is there anything else?"

"Only the matter of getting yourself another boy. I don't want any part of this caper."

"Kaper," murmurs Mr. Kupperdinck, detecting the omitted "k." He gives me a barracuda-like grin as he picks another paper from his folder. "I thought

you might have some slight objection, so I wrote this letter addressed to your parole officer, telling him how disappointed we are that you seem to have failed to adjust to civilian life, and suggesting you might benefit from some additional time in the slammer. It's not dated—yet."

I ponder this for about three and a half seconds. "Now that you mention it," I say, "I've always wanted to visit Goobers Junction in June. Which way do I go?"

I have been in happier frames of mind as I leave the Ketchup King's aerie, and when I pass Newton Smedley's desk he gives me a sympathetic look. "I suppose Mr. Kupperdinck was his usual persuasive self," says Smedley. "Here's a check for expenses, Kit, and let me know where you'll be in case Ike wants to get in touch."

This is how I became a tenant in Mrs. Burbage's Boarding House for Single Gentlemen in Goobers Junction, a town that seems to have been in an economic decline since about 1893. Mrs. Burbage's place fits in beautifully, as does Mrs. Burbage, whose resemblance to a snapping turtle in flowered apron and steel-rimmed glasses is probably a matter of civic com-

ment. She is accompanied by a small brown and white fox terrier named Rushmore, who speaks fluent Yapanese and acts as though he has been waiting impatiently to sample an Augie Augenblick. Mrs. B. lets it be known that the two things she wants most from me are two weeks' rent in advance and no hanky-panky. As hanky-panky would have a hard time finding a foothold in Goobers Junction, she has little to fear on this score.

The one advantage Goobers Junction possesses is that it is easy to find your way around. I have no difficulty locating the Pettibone estate, and my problem of getting inside is unexpectedly simplified when I get a letter signed "Ike" containing an item clipped from the classified ads section of the local newspaper. The ad reads:

HANDYMAN WANTED

For general yard and housework. Low wages, no fringe benefits, no year-end or Christmas bonuses. Willing spirit and strong back essential. Apply to A. Pettibone, 840 Oak St.

Responding to this somewhat daunting plea the following morning, I am not much surprised to find that the police have not been called to restrain

the mob. In fact, I am one of a mob of two, the other being a guy who wants to sell A. Pettibone a lawn fertilizing and weed control service.

The Pettibone house is one of those enormous Victorian Gothic types, sprouting turrets and gables in an irresponsible manner and festooned with scrollwork, giving it the appearance of a wedding cake designed by an over-eager pastry chef. It is a wedding cake fallen on evil times, however. It could use a handyman. Also a painter, carpenter, groundskeeper and, perhaps, in the last analysis, a demolition expert. One has the feeling that when the door opens the Munster family will emerge, and I am hoping, as I ring the bell, that this Miss Pettibone is nothing like my fourth grade teacher, Miss Hammerlock, whose ability to maintain discipline with a ruler and an eye like a boiled onion was legendary.

What does emerge is no Miss Hammerlock, but an eye-popping doll of about twenty-five years of age, with hair the color of corn silk, blue-grey eyes, a figure that causes shortness of breath, and a smudge on her nose.

"Hi," says this vision. "Are you, I hope, the handyman of my dreams?"

"I hope so, too," I gargle. "I

mean, that was the idea."

"You may change your mind when you see the place," she says, with a sigh, "but you're hired. Come in. I'm Augusta Pettibone," she adds, extending the mitt.

"Augie Augenblick," I respond, grasping it reverently and letting go with reluctance.

Whatever Gilbert Pettibone may have invented, it wasn't a system for keeping a house in good repair, so there is no end of work for me to do. This puts me in the house, all right, but as far as ever from the laboratory, which squats in a corner of the property as unattainable as some Holy Grail while I am occupied with leaky faucets and shaky cellar stairs.

The next day is much like the first, except that when Augusta opens the door to admit me I can't help noticing that her hair is now a pale green. She notices me noticing.

"No doubt you're wondering why my hair is green?" she says.

"Well, it is a little late for Saint Patrick's Day, perhaps."

"It's because it's Thursday."

"I see."

"You don't either. Blame it on one of my Uncle Gilbert's inventions. When I moved in here I found a bottle labeled 'Color Shampoo' in his laboratory. And I hadn't any shampoo with me

so I thought I'd try his, only to find that it changes your hair color every day. Wednesdays it's blonde; Thursdays it's green; Fridays it's auburn. And so on. Like so many of Uncle Gilbert's ideas, it went a bit overboard. But I rather like the effect it has on the Goobers Junction citizenry."

"Fantastic!"

"You bet. Since then, I haven't dared set foot in his lab. He might have a pill that would make a person break out in brussels sprouts."

"Could he really?"

"It wouldn't surprise me. He wrote me that one of the things he was working on was a seafood sauce that also helped one reduce."

I wonder if she notices my ears suddenly standing at attention. "No kidding!"

"I kid you not. He was hoping to get back at a former employer. You've heard of Kupperdinck's Ketchup?"

"Of course."

"It should be Pettibone's Ketchup. The louse Kupperdinck stole Uncle Gilbert's recipe, then gave him the heave-ho. Uncle Gilbert considered suing, but the records showing that he had developed the formula on his own turned up missing. So Kupperdinck got rich and Uncle got the shaft."

"Tough!"

Augusta lapses into a brooding silence for a few moments, then shakes her pale green hair and says, "But life goes on. And meanwhile there's a lamp in the library that needs rewiring as soon as you finish replacing those floorboards."

A telephone message from "Ike" awaits me at Mrs. Burbage's that evening. It directs me to a rendezvous at Granny's Jiffy Cafe in downtown Goobers Junction where, as I stroll past Granny's booths, I am accosted by a noise like a faulty steam valve. It is a "Psst!" from Karl Kupperdinck. At least, it looks like a Karl Kupperdinck from the collar downwards. Above, swathed in a patently spurious beard and mustache, it resembles something carnivorous peering from the jungle.

"Is that a beard?" I inquire. "Or have you been tarred and feathered?"

"Never mind," he says. "Have you found it yet?"

"I haven't even gotten into the lab yet."

"What are you waiting for—an open house?"

"I'm going to try and get in tonight."

"Well, snap it up. I got another anonymous letter today and it as good as says there's actually a sample of the stuff

somewhere in that lab."

"If it's there I'll find it."

"You'd better!"

In order to burgle Pettibone's laboratory, it is first necessary to get out of Mrs. Burbage's boarding house without being detected either by Mrs. Burbage or the fox terrier Rushmore. No easy task, but an exact burglar has his methods. These are hardly needed to get into the lab itself, however, as it is guarded only by a padlock that can be opened by a small boy with a spoon.

The lab, I find, has been converted from a one-time carriage house; it retains doors big enough to admit a carriage and a pair of matched bays, and a loft area with another door handy for loading bales of hay. But the place is full of shelves, the shelves are full of bottles and jars that are full of Lord-knows-what, and the leftover space is full of bits of mechanical devices, work tables, and files full of papers. My first estimate is that it will be well into the twenty-first century before I have checked out everything.

Two more nights of snooping net me nothing but bags under the eyes and another visit from Kupperdinck at the Jiffy Cafe. He lets it be known that his patience is running on low and though he doesn't actually

snort fire and flame, there is a glitter in his eye that is almost as unnerving. He is slightly mollified when I tell him that, according to Augusta, the stuff he is looking for is also supposed to be a weight reducer, and he departs with a reminder about that memo to my parole officer—a jarring note hardly conducive to raising employee morale, particularly since I am becoming less and less willing to pull such a scurvy trick on a curvy chick like Augusta, who is looking more and more like the type of girl you could grow to like scraping wallpaper and refinishing woodwork with.

Then it is Sunday, or lavender hair day, and Augusta tells me she is at last ready to face sorting out the junk in the laboratory, so we trek over, open up, and she takes a long look at the jumble and says, "Oh, my!"

We set to work, and by this time I am more than half hoping never to find what I'm looking for. So of course in mid-afternoon I find myself gazing at a dusty bottle with a hand-printed label reading, PETTIBONE'S SEAFOOD SAUCE.

Ta-da!

"What is it?" asks Augusta, responding to my inadvertent yip. "Oh, that's the stuff I was telling you about."

"Wonder what's in it?"

Augusta shrugs. "If there is

any recipe, it would probably be over there in Uncle Gilbert's desk. Why?"

"Just curious."

So in the end it is just that simple. I have both the Pettibone formula and the Pettibone Seafood Sauce sample in hand. Mission accomplished. Victory assured. Break out the streamers and confetti. All I have to do is turn them over to Karl Kupperdinck and life will once more be just a bowl of cherries. Only—I can't do it.

It seems I have fallen in love with Augusta Pettibone.

I battle with my conscience all the following day, and it is pretty much of a draw until Augusta is about to turn out the lights and close up the lab for the day. Somewhat to my surprise I hear myself saying, "Gussie, I have a confession to make . . ." and placing the sauce bottle and recipe on the table before her.

She hears me out without turning a hair—which, by the way, is blue today and quite fetching—then says, "Well! And what do you propose to do next? Tie me up and scamper off to Karl Kupperdinck?"

"Actually, I was thinking more along the lines of giving up the project and hopping the next boat to Patagonia."

"I thought you might have

something like that in mind," interrupts a third voice, and we turn to find Karl Kupperdinck in our midst. Though the beard is happily missing, that unsettling gleam is back in his eye. Taken along with the gun in his hand, the whole presents a decidedly unwelcome vista.

"Smedley said I shouldn't trust you too far, and it appears the little twerp was right. Won't you do the introductions?"

"Not necessary," says Augusta, coldly. "Uncle Gilbert once told me that if I ever ran into something looking like a blue-ribbon class Berkshire in a pinstripe it would likely be Karl Kupperdinck, who filched his ketchup formula."

"Your Uncle Gilbert wouldn't have known what to do with it, anyway. Tie her up," he says to me. And after I have tied Augusta's hands behind her back and bound her to a pillar as instructed, he does the same to me. A certain air of bleakness and bafflement descends.

"I always say, if you want it done well, do it yourself," says Karl, in a self-satisfied tone.

"This will do you no good," I break in. "We—we changed bottles on you. The real one is hidden where you'll never find it!"

"Assuming you were smart enough to try such a stunt," says Kupperdinck, "I'm sure I

could get it out of you. But just to be certain . . ." He opens the Pettibone bottle and digs in with a spoon. His eyes roll appreciatively. "Yum!" he murmurs, taking another spoonful, and another. "Delicious! A kind of nutty-lemony flavor, but very subtle. Can't quite identify it, but it's the goods, all right. Yum! Positively habit-forming! I'd offer you some," he adds, licking the spoon, "but I'm afraid neither of you is going to live long enough to really enjoy it."

There is a cold sensation down my spinal column as I begin to suspect that the Ketchup King has turned the corner into Kookytown. He pounds a fist on the table and announces that he proposes to rule the world of condiments shortly, that he is going to have to build a new Building D to hold the hundred-dollar bills soon to be flooding in, with possibly an even larger one for the tens and twenties. As he goes on, I notice a peculiar phenomenon occurring. Karl Kupperdinck seems to be growing. He now looks about six and a half feet tall, and as he sets down the sauce bottle he suddenly gains another six inches.

"And if it reduces weight as you said, there'll be no stopping it!" he concludes, with a giggle. "In fact, I feel lighter already! Wonderful, wonderful! I've got a gold mine! Whoops!" This last

as he realizes that he is now fully afloat, about three feet off the ground. "Hey, what's up?"

"Don't look now, but I think you are," I say.

Augusta doesn't comment, mostly because of the gag in her mouth, but she emits some trenchant gurgles as Kupperdinck wafts to and fro. Eyes bulging, he fans the air and manages to sort of swim down to the table where his pistol lies. "What kind of trick is this?" he cries, in growing alarm. "Get me down from here, you moron!"

"Sorry, no can do. Somebody thoughtlessly tied us up."

"Get me down!" he repeats. "Or I'll—"

I don't know whether he really intends to fire, but as his fingers close over the pistol it anchors him to the table and his feet bob up over his head. There is a big bang. Splinters from the table go zinging past my ears, and the recoil sends Kupperdinck rocketing up into the loft as the gun drops from his hand. The echoes have hardly died when the door opens and someone says, "What's going on?"

It is Newton Smedley. "What happened?" he says. "Where's Mr. Kupperdinck?"

Where's Kupperdinck, indeed? We peer up into the rafters and see nothing but the wide-open loft door swinging

gently in the breeze.

"I'm not sure," I gasp, "but if he catches the jet stream he could be over Newfoundland by morning."

What with getting us untied and having our circulation restored, it is some time before anybody says anything, and in the interim I do some heavy thinking I should have done before.

"Why do I have the feeling," I manage, at last, "that the two of you somehow cooked up this whole scenario?"

"Who, us?" says Augusta, chafing her ankles and wrists.

"When I left Karl's office," I tell Smedley, "you called me 'Kit' and said I'd be keeping in touch with 'Ike.' How would you know those code names unless you'd been listening in on the intercom? And those anonymous letters arousing Karl's curiosity—they must have been written by someone who knew all about this lab and that amazing seafood sauce, like Gussie here. And that very convenient Help Wanted ad—you knew I'd be bound to answer. And I wonder how I got on the Kupperdinck payroll to begin with—unless maybe Smedley thought it might be handy to have an ex-burglar in inventory. And how come that bottle

of sauce showed up so conveniently after I'd already spent days looking for it?"

Augusta looks at Smedley. Smedley looks at Augusta.

"I guess you've got us," she says. "It was mostly Newton's idea. We found the sauce and its formula after Uncle Gilbert died—along with a note with a very specific warning about its weight-reducing effects. Uncle Gilbert thought it was a flop because it eliminated weight but somehow left the bulk. We tried to figure out some way for Karl to find it. We never thought he'd go flying off into the stratosphere like that, of course; we didn't realize how powerful that sauce was."

"We thought maybe we could scare him into giving Augusta some of the proceeds of his stolen ketchup formula," Smedley explains. "Gilbert was my very good friend and I always thought he should get his due."

"What's going to happen to the ketchup works if Karl never comes back to earth?"

"Oh," Newton grins, "I rather expect the board of directors will put me in charge. You see, I'm the only one who knows the combination to the vault where the formula is kept. Your job on the bottling line is safe—if you want it—and Augusta should turn out to be a very wealthy young lady."

"Raymond will be so pleased!" says Augusta, beaming.

"Raymond? Who's Raymond?" I want to know.

"My fiancé. I left him back in Chicago while I closed up Uncle Gilbert's estate."

"Ah!"

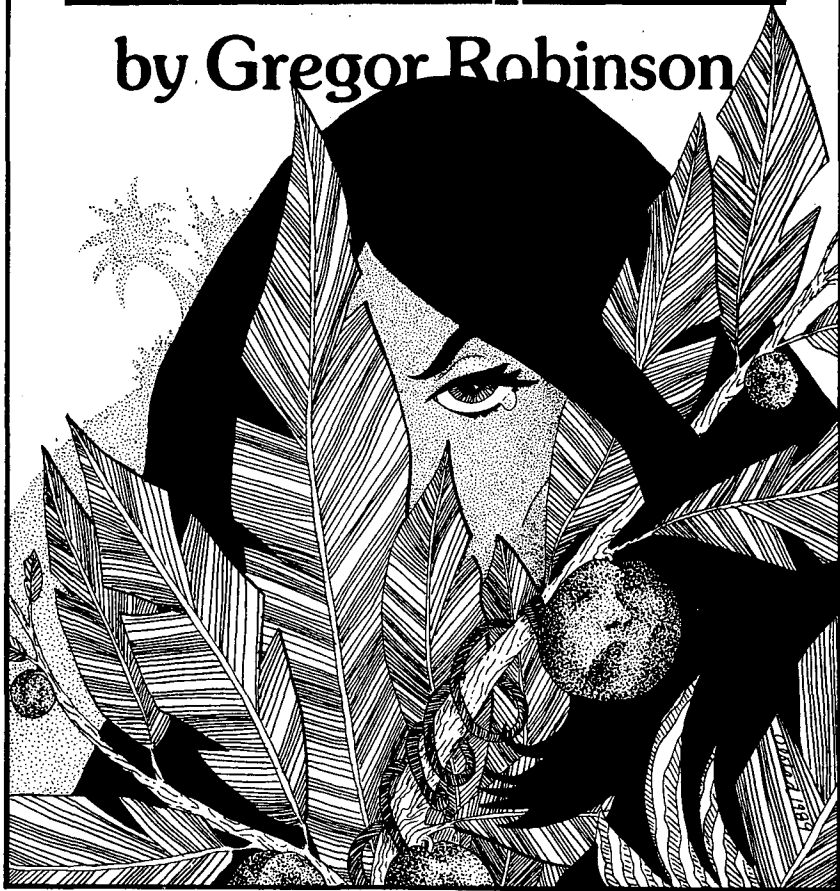
Well, what does one say when a fiancé of whom one has been completely unaware pops out of the woodwork? Is it enough for me to point out that I will love her when her hair has turned to silver, having stood by her through auburn, blonde, green, blue, and lavender? Better I should simply float out of her life.

But not when full of seafood sauce, thanks.

FICTION

Metamorphosis

by Gregor Robinson



Bonita was the name of the girl who tried to kill Healey and also the name of a kind of tree, which was appropriate —*Bonita daphnoides*, genus *Myoporaceae*, also not common, found mostly on Exuma, Cat Island, and Inagua, and in Cuba and the Guianas. Except for the swaying palms that haunt your dreams, all the trees of the subtropics look the same. Then you learn that

Illustration by Patricia Olstad

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some can cause hot rashes and running sores. Some can make a person pale and sick with chills and fever. Like an onion, the surface keeps peeling away from these islands, until you are left with something no longer shimmering and exotic but something hot, dense, and as real as a bad itch.

I started to know the difference, to see things in a different way. I would make notes in the back of my diary while the girl worked on the terrace and Healey lolled nearby with a tall drink of rum and fruit juice in a frosted glass.

Around the shore of the lee side of the island, close by the still green sea, grew the poison wood tree—*Metopium toxiferum*. "With smooth firm leaves," I wrote, "dark green below but shiny above, the poison wood is a most attractive tree. But you must wear gloves when handling the branches and leaves, for even a touch of the white sap raises long dark welts."

This I learned, too late—Dr. Cutter at the village clinic gave me calamine lotion a day or two later, but it did no good—while Healey and I were helping Tom Hargreaves clear fallen vegetation from the garden of the house he owned, a rental, out on Pigeon Point. In the fall the hurricanes had strewn debris everywhere; the house had stood empty throughout the previous winter, the height of the season.

Pigeon Point. Pigeon Cay. Why pigeon? I asked Hargreaves. Why not Palm Point?

After the pigeon plum, he said. That was the first species I learned. Later I learned that even the palm trees are different: there are many kinds. The coconut and the tall royal palm, planted for the benefit of the tourists, grew high on the ocean side of the island. Inland and on the lee side grew the stubby round top, the saw palmetto, and the pond top, the bark and leaves of which fell everywhere. Hargreaves made some remark about the palms, how you didn't want the bark rotting on the ground, fouling up the garden.

"What's the difference?" said Healey, with a sweep of his hand. Everything looked tangled and messy to him. Sunlight filtered through the canopy like leafy golden dust.

Healey stopped working to take a drink of the exotic mixture he made up from high proof rum and sweet coconut syrup that came in a tin from Florida. He was always stopping while Tom and Able and I kept working. I was on the roof, throwing old shingles into large baskets on the ground below. In a tiny pool of water in the gutter by my side, I saw a lazy water bug which never got below

the surface. (Dr. Cutter told me later that all his life Healey's legs would ache in steamy weather; the skin would turn rough and scaly like the skin of some coldblooded creature that lived in the stinking waters of those dark lagoons.)

It was summer in the islands, but the breezes would be coming soon. Healey had announced that he had to get out of New Providence; his house was insufferably hot. I needed a place to stay, for, after months of cajoling, the workmen were coming from across the channel to replace the cistern at my cottage, and I would be without water for several weeks. It was too early for the tourists, so Hargreaves had agreed to lend us his property at Pigeon Point for a couple of months. In a tax haven, people are kind to bankers; it's a compulsion, what Healey called the off-shore funds complex.

All morning we gathered branches and cuttings from the rocky garden and paths in front of the house. We made a ragged pile; from there Able hauled the debris through the woods to a fire that sent oily smoke curling up above the treetops.

Except for the roving dogs, Able's mule was the only domestic animal on the island. Mrs. Holborne had brought a horse over one year to amuse her grandchildren when they came from Connecticut at Christmastime, but she had shipped it back; the maintenance was too much even for her. Grass will not grow on the islands, and the cost of bringing in bales of hay was more expensive than flying in fresh prime beef from Palm Beach.

Able's mule was like a goat; it ate the pigeon plums and the rinds of old fruit, the roots of peculiar shrubs. People said that Able had a way with nature. He had the mule, several dogs, and an orchard of papayas, limes, and avocados that thrived where no one else's would. He knew the islands; his family had been here for two hundred years. He was short and strong and he rarely spoke.

After lunch we climbed to the roof to hammer in the new shingles. From there you could look down to the sea bottom. This side of the island was chiseled coral rock, sharp and porous; there was no sand nor rollers nor gurgling streams to cloud the water, which remained always clear—a radiant green.

Healey stood and pointed. "Look," he shouted.

Around the bay, close to shore, there came a shadow, languid and undulating. The shadow circled, swam lazily beneath the slats of the pier, then circled back towards us again. Healey scrambled across the shingles to the ladder. Then he was on the deck with

Hargreaves' gun. The shots were like muffled pops. There were two tiny pings on the water; then, just below the surface, the thrashing of the giant ray. Wounded, it headed out towards the channel and the open sea. Healey fired again and missed.

"Put that thing away. It's not a toy." Hargreaves spoke in a strangled voice, and Able stared at Healey with a look of more than mere contempt. With Able it was sometimes hard to tell. His eyes were flat and almost pink. I asked him what would happen to the ray.

"Swim across the channel to the swamps to die," he said, "if the sharks don't get him."

Able must have built an immunity to the sap of the poison wood tree; I noticed he didn't wear gloves.

Bonita arrived wearing a long flowered skirt and a white T-shirt with a picture of the lighthouse across her small breasts. Her hair was straight black; her eyes dark and almost Oriental—part Arawak I liked to imagine; there must be some of the blood still in the islands, though the people have been gone for hundreds of years. She was slim and she moved like a dancer.

"Jesus," said Healey. He went inside to change into a clean shirt and white linen pants.

"You'll be wanting someone to help around the place," Tom Hargreaves had said. "How would it be if I arrange for the girl to come in twice a week, Able's sister?"

She was perhaps fifteen years younger than Healey and me, only nineteen or twenty years old. That first morning she made the house spotless. At Healey's invitation she stayed on for lunch. On the terrace she smiled at us from under downcast eyes. There was the aroma of some exotic plant around her, orange blossom perhaps. It made you dizzy.

After that she came regularly on Wednesday mornings and Friday afternoons, when I was away at the bank. I believe Healey arranged this schedule with some care. He was supposed to be working—taking the MacKee across the channel every morning to the office which ran all the branches in the out islands—but whenever I came home he was there. He was doing this stint at the bank only to placate his father; for him it was a holiday.

One morning I was awakened by furtive rustlings, bare feet on the wooden floor, sibilant whispers. I saw her through the jalousies of the bedroom door. She was dressing and her back was towards

me. She was lithe, but in some ways she still had the body of a child. This was the first I knew that she was coming to stay overnight.

"Why so secretive?" I said to Healey. "Did you think I wouldn't approve?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It was her that wanted things quiet, not me."

But he must have told her I knew, for after that she started to stay more often, to be around the house even when I was home. The house was cleaner, for now she had more time—she and Healey no longer had to snatch their hours together. And she was always busy. Healey would lie in the hammock on the terrace while she shelled peas into a large iron pot, or darned his socks, or set up the ironing board and pressed our sheets and trousers. My shirts would be neatly folded in my drawer. The refrigerator was always filled with food—baked chicken, a loaf of homemade bread, a spicy salad of conch and lime juice.

One day she brought us something we never had in the islands—fresh meat, pink and tender. Not some cut of beef, as I had guessed, but duck. She said it came from the marshy inlets on the large island at the far end of the archipelago—secret lagoons. Able shot the birds in season, then kept them dressed and frozen. Neither Able nor Bonita would say exactly where the locals hunted, though Healey offered cash if she would reveal the secret.

I had never lived like this before; it was like having a servant. I found I was able to overlook things that I heard in the village—about Mr. Healey and Bonita from White Cove, and—did they have an understanding? It appeared that word was out. I was also prepared to put up with the noise, for Healey and Bonita no longer bothered with discretion. In the darkness of the warm nights I heard the sounds of their lovemaking.

Since the end of her third marriage, Mrs. Holborne had taken to spending eight months a year in the islands, and she was always the first member of the winter community to arrive. She never came by regular ferry service but would charter an entire boat for herself.

There was much bustle at the pier as the boat came into view around Eagle Rock. Pierre and some of the other Haitians were waiting in a van to take the luggage and supplies up to her house on North Point. Vans were not easy to come by on Pigeon Cay—there were only several miles of road on the island and per-

haps twenty vehicles altogether—and it had taken me some trouble to arrange. I had given Pierre my business card, along with a note of welcome to Mrs. Holborne.

Through the frangipani leaves, I watched the arrival from the window of the bank. Besides Mrs. Holborne and her maid there was an elderly man in a blue blazer and a young blonde woman, the first of a steady stream of houseguests.

Next day at lunch at the Patio Bar of the Majestic Hotel, Healey said:

“Look at those tits. Jesus.”

The woman with blonde hair sat at the far end of the pool, reading a fat paperback novel.

“She’s staying with Mrs. Holborne,” I said.

“Even better,” said Healey.

He was thrilled to be included in the dinner invitation which Pierre brought to the office three days later. For me it was business (my stratagem with the van had worked), but for Healey there was something much more important, a breath of air from the other world—the world of the rich.

I worked late that evening; we were to go to the dinner straight from the bank. Healey arrived wearing a white suit. He reeked of Old Lime.

We docked at Sandy Inlet, then crossed the isthmus by the path through the casuarina trees. Beyond the ridge, the Atlantic rollers crashed on the sand, ashy grey in the dusk. Mrs. Holborne’s house was a sprawling place of cedar and glass. To one side was the tennis court, some outbuildings, and a couple of golf carts which Mrs. Holborne and her guests used to travel to the village. Behind the house was the swimming pool.

“What a spread,” said Healey. We made our way towards the gate.

“David, how nice of you to come. And this must be your friend, Mr. Healey, is it?”

Mrs. Holborne spoke in a monotone. For a woman with a fabled past she had a placid exterior. She never fully opened her eyes.

“Mrs. Holborne, good evening,” said Healey. “What a wonderful house. And how awfully nice of you to include me.”

I looked at Healey with some surprise. I was used to seeing him languid and bored, not this kind of jolliness and oily charm. He positively sparkled. That was the effect money had on Healey.

“Mmm,” said Mrs. Holborne. She glanced down her nose at him. “But you really should be thanking Hermione. She saw you at the

hotel, I think?" Mrs. Holborne often phrased her conversation as questions.

"Mr. Healey, David Rennison. May I present my niece."

"Hi." Hermione spoke with a nasal accent, the New England honk, and she made the word into two syllables. She turned to Healey and said it again. *Haw-igh*. Then she flounced away. In the rooms behind us servants bustled, setting out food and mixing drinks. There was lobster, roast beef, rolls, and, as in the refrigerator at home, conch salad with hot peppers and lime.

There were six other guests besides ourselves, and I saw at once why Healey and I had been invited. Apart from Hermione, we were the only people younger than mid-fifties. There were plenty of young people in the islands, but not of the sort for Mrs. Holborne's niece.

At dinner I sat across from Hermione. She wore a silk dress with a loose halter top. When she leaned forward, in a sloppy kind of way, one elbow on the table, her hand near her mouth—you could see her breasts. She had a way of laughing that began with a whoop and ended in giggles as though she were running out of breath. I had no doubt she liked horses.

After dinner there were two tables of bridge. Hermione and Healey offered to sit out. "You go ahead," Healey said to me, all gallantry. "Hermione and I will walk on the beach."

"Fantastic," said Hermione.

When they returned an hour later, they sat on the terrace facing the ocean, drinking beer from clear bottles.

I accompanied Mrs. Holborne to the front door when the other guests rose to leave. Mrs. Holborne reached across and took my wrist. "Why don't you stay, have a swim in the pool, you and Hermione and your friend. There are bottles of beer in the kitchen." She waved her hand, then turned down the hall towards her bedroom.

As I strolled into the living room, I heard laughing—Healey's guffaw, Hermione's honk and giggle. They were standing by the french doors. Healey had an arm around her neck. They stood there clinging to one another, swaying and laughing. Healey turned and gave her a peck on the cheek. Then he slipped his hand beneath her halter top; the thing slithered away and she was naked to the waist. More hooting and giggling. They turned to the french doors. As they crossed the floodlit terrace the dress fell to her ankles. Healey stumbled along as he lifted one foot, then the other; he wrestled with his pants, and threw his shirt into the night, and I

saw two moonlit bodies as they raced for the pool. I heard the splash of their dives and turned to walk home. As I passed by the kitchen door, there came a fragrance, sweet and fading, like orange blossoms.

One morning Healey appeared dressed for tennis. "Expecting a busy day at the office?" I asked. "They need a fourth at the Holbornes'." He gulped his orange juice without sitting down.

After that he was often away. If it wasn't tennis, it was a fourth at bridge, or windsurfing on the sea side of the island, or taking Hermione and Mrs. Holborne down to Sandy Cay in the MacKee to snorkel at the reef. There were cruises on the Hargreaves' sloop and barbecue dinners at the Patio Bar of the Majestic. There was deep-sea fishing from a boat belonging to one of the Colombians. Several nights he didn't come home.

"That fellow, Healey," said Mrs. Holborne, "he has beautiful manners. But such a scoundrel. When is he going back to Nassau, or wherever it is he is from?"

It was a Friday morning at the bank; I had been successful; Mrs. Holborne was to become my customer. She knew Healey was a friend of mine, but she didn't care if she insulted him.

"I understand he's friendly with some of these . . ." she waved her hand in the air ". . . native girls."

It was known at the yacht club that Mrs. Holborne's last marriage had ended because of some trouble with a stable manager. All the same, she was a terrible snob.

"When is your niece returning to the States?" I asked.

"Sooner than she thinks," said Mrs. Holborne.

Healey was out when I arrived home. Bonita was finishing the cleaning; I asked her if he had left any message; if she knew where he was. She only shrugged her shoulders. A few moments later she came onto the verandah where I was reading the Miami paper to tell me that this would be her last day working for us.

I dozed and was awakened by the clatter of pots and pans. When I went to the kitchen door, Healey put up his hands and barred the way.

"No, no. You can't come in. Big surprise. We have any wine left? A nice red—you have a look, will you?"

He hustled me out of the room.

An hour later, seated and with the wine poured, Healey brought in the plates. Pan-fried potatoes and boiled beans with red peppers,

nothing special. But the meat—it was pink and succulent and tender—a little like fillet of beef.

"Duck," said Healey, beaming. He had finally managed to get Able to take him hunting. They had gone to the lagoon by early morning darkness. Able had left Healey with the shotgun to wait for the sun. He had stood in the swamp in Able's leaky waders for a couple of hours. Able returned to pick him up at around nine o'clock.

"Where is this place?" I asked. Healey swore me to secrecy, then showed me on the chart.

"And you shot this? Delicious."

"Well, not exactly," said Healey. "I did get a couple, but I traded with Able for the one we're actually eating. You see, they have to hang for a few days."

I was awakened by screaming. I leapt from my bed. The screaming pierced the night air. I stumbled along the darkened hallway towards a sliver of yellow light that shone beneath the door of Healey's room. He was sitting up in bed, the covers down at his feet, and he stared down at his body with horror on his face; his legs were no longer legs; they were black and swollen trunks, elephantine; the skin was like the burned blackened skin of char-broiled meat, in places about to crack and flake. I saw bits of oozing pink glistening between the fissures. He held his hands in the air, as if holding back from touching something, like a person who comes across a dead animal in the street. His hair was matted to his forehead.

I tried to raise Dr. Cutter on the radiophone, but she could not be reached; she was at Little Harbour and would not be back until the following day. I managed to get Healey to lie down, and I placed a cold, damp washcloth on his forehead. The fever seemed to be rising. For the distended skin on his legs, all I could try was cream from a tiny tube of cortisone, but when I touched him, he cried in pain. Towards morning I tried again; as I dabbed at the skin with cotton swab a piece of his flesh came off in my hand. Healey moaned, a wave of nausea swept over me, and I gave up.

When Isobel Cutter arrived at noon he was delirious. "He's too sick to move," she said. "I'll have to stay here." She sent Pierre back to the clinic to pick up medicine and equipment. "It could be poison. How do you feel?"

I told her about the duck dinner, but I felt fine. She stared at Healey's legs; she had never seen anything like it. It was as though

he had walked through raging fire or been sprayed with acid.

Isobel remained by Healey's side all night. By Sunday, he was well enough to be moved to the village clinic. He began to improve. In the middle of the following week a woman that none of us knew came to pick him up. She had dark hair, glossy and hennaed, and she said she had a small plane across the channel. Healey hobbled across the road to the government pier where a water taxi waited. His legs were no longer black and swollen; the blisters had gone but the skin was still raw.

I was loading suitcases and books into the MacKee, preparing to move from Pigeon Point, when Able came by in a tin boat. He helped Bonita onto the pier with her buckets and cleaning fluids, then sped away. I said:

"That was excellent duck your brother gave to Healey. Any chance of more for me?"

She stared at me for a moment.

"No, Mr. Rennison. Not for you." She turned up the path towards the house.

Sea gulls. That's what I think Healey actually shot. He wouldn't know the difference. He wouldn't know that there were no ducks in the islands in August. Nor would he know about the manchioneel tree: *Hippomane mancinella*, genus *Euphorbiaceae*, which I found in that steamy lagoon, a species I had never seen because it was extirpated from most of the islands generations ago. It survives near the coast only in certain remote areas and tangled swamps, where the branches and the fruit—about an inch across, rounded and yellow-green in color—fall to the still waters and rot. The sap of the manchioneel causes severe contact dermatitis, consisting of wheals, blisters, and erythema, ultimately and quickly leading to skin necrosis. The toxin of the fruit in the bloodstream can cause death. Dr. Cutter said that Healey was lucky to be alive. But on hot days, at certain times of year, when the air is close and humid, the skin of his legs and thighs will become as shiny, hard, and scaly as a reptile's.

FICTION



“I just don’t think you should have forced her to go, that’s all,” Chet said as he folded the foil back from what Alice called a TV dinner. Funny, he’d lived years

alone and never thought to try this convenience meal. Once he moved in with his daughter and her family he had them regularly, at least once a month.

“But, Dad, I’m telling you I

didn't force her. She wanted to go. She was just hesitant. I mean, it's all new." Alice got up and turned off the oven. Bert's dinner was going to dry out. She'd expected him home before now.

"She sure cried last night," Chet said.

Alice poured the iced tea. "She got herself all worked up. She's had her duffel bag packed for a week. It did her good to cry."

"It upset me."

"Aw, Dad." Alice reached across the table and gentled his wrist. "You should have come with me and seen how much she liked the camp. She was scared but happy. And her counsellor is really nice—Kate something or other. She's got braces on her teeth, so Emily was fascinated. I don't know why she's so set on getting braces herself."

"I had to get my car tires checked," Chet said. "That's why I couldn't come with you."

Alice laughed. "You were afraid to come in case she cried again. Well, she didn't."

"Was not," said Chet. "But she didn't cry, eh?"

"No. Oh, here's Bert. It's about time. I cooked your dinner. It's still in the oven."

"Evans kept me talking about the quote. I don't really want the job. He's the worst chisler. Now he wants a fancy railing on the deck, but he doesn't see

why I have to charge extra. Next I'll be re-siding his house as part of the original job." He got his dinner.

"Been slaving all day over a hot stove, eh, Al?" he grinned.

"I just got back half an hour ago. The pot holes on the road north of Pickering are awful. Left over from the spring, a lady in a store told me. I stopped and bought Emily some chips and pop—sort of a treat for her first night."

Chet watched, fascinated, as Bert opened his TV dinner by cutting a cross in the middle of the foil and then peeling back from the middle corners. He'd tried it once and burned his fingers on the steam.

"So how was she?" Bert asked.

"Fine. She's got a bunk by a window so she can see the stars at night."

"She didn't cry," Chet said.

"It's only for two weeks," Alice told him.

Chet thought it a very long period for a nine-year-old to be away from home alone the very first time.

That was on Saturday.

On Tuesday a postcard came from Emily that said: "Dear Mom and Dad and Gramps—I like camp mostly. We drink well water unless it rains. Don't forget to feed my turtles and guppies. But not each other. Hah hah. I need more toothpaste. Love, Emily."

Chet worried about the "mostly" and hoped she wasn't drinking rain water that had run off the roof. He'd read somewhere that the sun on shingles caused poisons that could be gathered up by the rain.

Alice laughed and sighed when he told her this. "Dad, what a worrywart. How did I turn out so carefree, being raised by such a worrier?"

"I was too busy to worry then, I was trying to make a decent living. Now I've got time to worry."

She realized he was serious and gave his neck a hug. He was stubbly. It was one of his non-shaving days. "I'm more worried about the toothpaste. What could she have done with a whole tube of toothpaste in two or three days?"

"Maybe she's got nothing better to do than brush her teeth," Chet suggested.

Alice laughed. "I doubt that."

At two P.M. on Thursday the camp director phoned to tell them that one of the girls was missing; she was evidently kidnapped. Parents were being alerted in case they wanted to take their own daughters home.

Alice was out visiting when the call came. Bert had stopped by the house to pick up a keg of nails and was having a cup of coffee with Chet. Chet was glad he was there. On his own he might have immediately

rushed to collect Emily.

As it was they waited until Alice came home, and then, when she got all upset and Bert was calming her down, Chet found himself saying, "Maybe it would be less traumatic for her if we let her stay. If she wants to. Mrs. Edwards said that some of the girls had to stay on because their parents were away, and some of the other girls were begging to be allowed to stay."

"What did Emily say?" Alice wanted to know.

"She sounded okay," Bert said. "She said it was kind of scary and exciting at the same time."

"Mrs. Edwards said they were taking major precautions," Chet put in. "She didn't think there was any danger to the other campers. The missing girl is quite well off, I take it."

"How do they know she hasn't run away?"

"The police say it looks like a kidnapping. She was seen talking to a man out on the road leading to town."

"Oh my god," said Alice and went toward the back door. Halfway to the garage she stopped and called back to Chet and Bert, who had come to the door to see where she was going. "Aren't you coming?" she asked. They were.

Chet insisted on driving. Bert ground his teeth while Chet went back for his keys, and Al-

ice asked him not to do this. "It gets on my nerves," she told him.

An instant later Chet returned and got into the driver's seat. "They were in my yesterday pants," he said, jangling the keys. "I want to drive—it steadies my nerves."

Alice didn't like Chet's car—it had sticky vinyl seats and it suffered from benign neglect—but she was too upset to object.

The three of them sat in the front seat the whole time as if willing the car there. Not to go faster—Chet was almost speeding—but just to get there.

Alice gave tense directions, and for once Chet did not fault her saying left or right instead of north or south.

The pot holes *were* terrible. "At least there's not much traffic," Bert muttered as they bounced along.

"Camp Oh-kah-lay," Chet read as they turned in under a sign formed with twigs. "What kind of a name is that?"

"It's a bird call," Alice said distractedly. "A red-shouldered blackbird or something. Mrs. Edwards is a keen naturalist." The camp looked peaceful in the afternoon sun. Alice thought it should look like the upheaval she felt.

"There she is!" Bert suddenly shouted as a group of girls sit-

ting on a picnic bench watched them approach.

Emily ran over to the car. "What are you doing here?" she asked.

The three adults looked back at her.

"We thought you might want to see us," Chet said as Alice was saying, "I guess we were worried," and Bert suddenly remembered the job he was supposed to be returning to. His men must be wondering what on earth had happened to him.

"I guess you wanted to see me," Emily said and leaned in the car window across her father and gave Alice a hug.

Two of the other girls had wandered over. "This is Mavis," Emily said, chumming her arm around a thin girl with coral-colored hair and a sunburned nose. "She's from England. She's staying with her aunt and uncle while her parents are away on a tour, but she wanted to come to camp when Brenda did. This is Brenda. They're cousins."

Both girls said hello and then scuffed away a bit.

"Better see the camp director—who's it?—Mrs. Edwards?" Bert was asking as he got out of the car. The door made a crunchy sound when it opened. He'd been telling Chet for weeks to get it fixed before it seized up and needed a major repair.

Alice slid out after him, feeling a bit foolish and overreactive. Especially since Emily was looking at her as if she understood. Sometimes she felt Emily would manage quite well without a mother.

Emily closed the car door as her parents walked up the path in the direction of the main lodge.

She leaned in the car window and stared at her grandfather. "The door still makes that awful noise. I thought you were going to get it fixed."

"You're as bad as your dad. How come you girls are down here on your own? Where's a supervisor?"

"That's Cataline, right there. Isn't that a pretty name? Some girls call her Cate, but I like it long out."

Chet looked over at the youngish woman who was sitting on a picnic bench braiding a little girl's hair. She didn't look much older than some of the campers, but on further appraisal Chet could see she did look responsible. She kept glancing over at Chet and Emily.

"She's got a brother who's had part of his nose cut off," Emily was saying. "He had to get it drafted back on. But it worked."

Chet stared at her for a moment. "I think you mean grafted.

Like they do to trees."

"Oh. I thought it was a funny word."

"Do you just sit around a lot?" he wanted to know. The camp wasn't cheap, and if all they did was lounge on picnic tables and have campers kidnapped, he was going to suggest to Alice and Bert that they were wasting their money.

"We're supposed to be on a hike. For orienteering. That's where you find your way around by pretending you're lost."

"Want to go for a walk?" he asked her. "You could show me the lake."

"It's a river and sort of a pond. We've got a pool for real swimming. I gotta ask Cataline."

She ran off to consult with Mavis and Brenda first, but they shook their heads—Chet supposed at the suggestion they come along. He was just as glad. She came skipping back.

"I can go." Chet gave the woman a wave and was answered with a wide smile of silver.

"I wish I could try on her braces," Emily sighed and Chet also sighed but for a different reason as his tongue touched the metal work in his own mouth which he wished he didn't have. He hoped Emily would never find out about his dentures.

They walked on a needled

path that sloped gradually toward a glycerine-looking river. Chet felt hot and sticky and suddenly realized he'd tuned out the environment in his Emily concern. He also ran his hand over his unshaven face—this was three days in a row—and hoped he didn't have to meet Mrs. Edwards.

By the river he sat on a grassy bank and started to take off his shoes. Emily kicked her sneakers into the woods, gave him an impish look, avoided his mock swat at her, and stood in the shallows.

"Did you know the girl who was kidnapped?" he asked after a companionable silence in which he'd taken off his shoes and socks and put them neatly beside him with a raised-eyebrow glance at Emily which she either missed or ignored, then dangled his feet in the water.

"Your pants are getting wet," Emily told him. "I didn't really know her. I mean I knew her, but she was sort of stuck up."

"She's rich," Chet said and then wished he hadn't. Emily quite often took him at his word; he didn't want to be responsible for prejudicing her for life. Besides, he hoped she'd one day be rich.

"Yeah, she told me." Emily leaned over to free a stick that she'd caught between her toes but now could not get rid of.

"Not me exactly. Wendy said she was going to go to Europe to school if her aunt would pay for it and that it cost a lot. And then Elizabeth—not the one in my group, the one in Group D—she said her father said he'd prefer to spend his money here and not splash it around in foreign countries. Then Wendy said, Well, people with rich fathers could afford to be choosy, but she was rich by apology and had to—"

"Rich by what?" Chet hated to interrupt her when she was relating an incident or a conversation; her face took on so many expressions he almost felt he'd been there.

"Apology. Something like that. Apology? Aproxy?"

Chet stared at her searching out the word, and she stared back, trying to give it.

"Oh. Proxy. Did she say proxy?" Chet asked.

"I guess so. What does it mean?"

"Um, in place of. Good god, what language you girls use nowadays. Alice wouldn't have known to use 'proxy' at your age."

"Oh, Wendy's not my age. She's old. She's fifteen. In Group D. Same as Elizabeth and Janice—the one that's kidnapped."

Chet looked at a piece of log caught in a tree root shaking back and forth in the easy cur-

rent like an admonishing finger. "I didn't realize she was that old."

"She has to be. To be in Group D."

Chet ignored what he considered the worst failing of women, this convoluted logic. "So what did this Janice say about being rich?"

"She said that her dad was so rich he could afford to give money away."

"He'll have to if there's a ransom," Chet said.

"There isn't yet. I heard Mrs. Edwards tell Wolfgang."

"Who's Wolfgang?"

"He's Mark's assistant. Mark teaches swimming. He's cute. He's grown up but not old. He flirts with all the girls." She paused and Chet saw her lips form a calm satisfied smile. His stomach clenched. His Evie used to smile like that when she was particularly pleased about something.

"So he flirts with you, eh?" Chet asked with amusement tinged enough with admiration that she responded.

"Well, sort of. He thinks I tell jokes really well. Do I?"

"I'd say you do." She smiled the same smile again and Chet marveled at what unique avenues satisfied a child. Likely not only children. He was suddenly struck by how pleased he'd felt on the two occasions

someone had told him he walked nicely.

"Mark doesn't pay attention to all the girls," Emily was saying. "He doesn't like Bridget or Nancy. And he ignored Janice."

Chet leaned over to watch the pattern his toes made when he combed them through the water. "Wonder why."

"They're all stuck up. Well, Nancy and Janice are. Bridget's just dumb. She hates boys."

She suddenly stared into space. "That's a blue jay. Hear that squawk?"

"And what kind of bird is that?" Chet asked as a shrill creased the air.

"I don't know," she said, frowning in her intense listening. "Maybe it's some sort of trouble call. Mrs. Edwards said birds can make all sorts of different sounds. Do you think it is, Gramps?"

Chet felt terrible for tricking her. "Actually that's not a bird, Em. It's a cicada."

"A what?"

"Cicada. An insect."

"Oh." She looked at him sideways and then perhaps was comforted by his apologetic eyes because she said, "I didn't know that." She toed some bank earth into the river.

"We'd better start back, Emily." He wiped his feet on the grass and used his socks to dry between his toes.

"I'm making you a surprise gift for your birthday," she told him. "In arts and crafts."

"Not another pencil holder?" he asked before he thought. She'd made him one at school for Christmas, one at Guides, and one on her own when she discovered how to melt crayons down juice cans. His dresser was crowded with pencil holders.

"Nope," she said cheerfully. "Nothing like it. I had to kill something to make this."

He had a sudden vision of a turtle shell paper clip holder or a chipmunk shoe shiner.

"Just teasing," she said as she went off to find her sneakers. She could only find one. Chet helped her look for the other and did not say, "I told you so," for which she was grateful.

"Do you really want to stay?" he asked.

"I like it here. I don't think kidnapping is catching. I mean I don't think it will happen again. And I don't talk to strangers in cars."

"Who saw her talking to the stranger?"

"Mark."

"Mark the Spark?"

"Gramps!" She rescued her sneaker from behind a log and marched back up the path with an injured posture. Chet took a second to worry about the veg-

etation around the log in which the sneaker had been, but he didn't really know what poison ivy looked like.

"Wait, Emily," he called, and she stopped and grinned at him and when he came alongside she linked her arm in his. He gave her a squeeze. He was missing her.

"Don't worry, Gramps. I'll be fine. Are my guppies okay?"

He had brought her up to date on all the pets by the time they got back to the picnic area. Bert and Alice were sitting where Cataline and the girls had been.

"Where'd everyone go?" Emily called out.

"A surprise movie in the Owl's Nest while you eat supper," Bert said. "We didn't know where you were."

"Oh—I've got to go," Emily said, hopping around trying to put on her other sneaker.

Alice rolled her eyes at Bert and Chet, but she looked relieved.

"We had a talk with Mrs. Edwards. She doesn't think there's any danger."

"You aren't rich enough for anyone to kidnap me," Emily said complacently, giving Alice a hug.

"Well, sorry," said Bert.

Alice returned the hug, prolonged it, kissed the top of Emily's head. "Be very careful.

Don't go off alone anywhere. Mrs. Edwards said they're being really strict about that. Always stay in a group."

"Okay." Emily gave Bert and Chet a hug.

"I'll watch until I see you go in the door," Bert said.

"Oh, Dad," Emily said but she started off at a cheerful trot.

"Emily," Alice suddenly called out, "why do you need more toothpaste?"

Emily stopped.

"Someone took mine. But it's okay—Mavis had an extra. A whole bunch of things got stolen. A comb and a sweater. A towel. Mrs. Edwards was really mad. She gave us a big lecture on thieves. But then Janice got kidnapped."

"Em—ily!" The fairhaired girl was calling from the door of the lodge. Emily gave a dismissal wave to her family and ran on.

As they were driving out the camp lane Alice told Chet, "They got the ransom note. A phone call actually. A whispering voice asking for a hundred thousand dollars."

"Whew," Chet breathed.

"He asked for it in gold. Gold rings or like that," Bert added.

They thought about this for a few miles.

"Well, she seemed fine anyway," Alice said. "Sorry I dragged you two up in a panic."

"Aw, Al, I'm glad you did. We

would have just worried. Better that we saw her."

"Just another eight days," Chet said.

Alice began to plan a repainting of Emily's room while she was away. Bert was thinking of what to tell his men and wondering what they had done for nails.

In West Hill Chet suddenly swerved the car to the side of the road, bumped over some gravel, and came to a stop beside a highway café. Alice jerked forward and backward, and Bert braced against the dashboard.

"Dad—what on earth—" Alice began.

"Christ, Chet, you could have killed us."

Chet sat with his hands gripping the steering wheel, staring straight ahead. He had both his lips caught between his teeth. He turned to Alice.

"Do you have the camp number?"

"The phone number?"

"Goddammit, Alice, I don't mean their permit number."

Alice went white, but she didn't say a word as she dug in her purse and came up with a tattered brochure. "I hate it when you get something in your head," she muttered as he took the paper from her and practically leaped from the car.

"What was that all about?" Bert said, letting out his breath.

"God knows. He can be a stubborn old coot. Likely wants to know if Emily's getting enough green vegetables or some idiotic thing. I thought he'd had a heart attack or something."

In the cafe Chet told the cashier, "I have to use the phone." He was courteous but firm. She pushed the one on the counter toward him.

It was long distance, but he went ahead with the call.

When a voice answered he said, "Get me Mrs. Edwards. This is extremely important."

"How the hell did you know?" Bert asked after Chet had hung up the phone at home the next day, relayed the information that Janice had been found safe and sound hiding in one of the camp outbuildings, and announced that it was he, Chet, who had suggested she was a party to her own kidnapping.

"I don't know," Chet said. "It was like a movie sort of unfolded as I was driving home. I guess it was the things Emily had said that just kind of fell into place. Janice had said her father was rich enough to give money away. The swimming coach had *not* paid any attention to her. She was fifteen—not ten or eleven as I had first thought. The clincher was the missing items. A comb, sweater,

toothpaste. Things someone would need but couldn't take if she was supposed to be kidnapped. And the same guy who said he saw her talking to a stranger was the one who ignored her. It suddenly formed a picture. It seemed to make sense."

"I wish Alice was home," Bert said, ecstatic over the excitement. Wait until he told Jim and Cleveland about this. They'd been really disparaging about Alice's father coming to live with them, how they had to juggle the cars in the driveway now, how Chet put in his two cents when it was none of his business. This would certainly gain him their respect. And Bert could stop defending Chet all the time.

The phone rang as Alice walked in the door, and for several minutes it was bedlam as Bert tried to tell Alice what had happened and Chet tried to hear what Emily was saying.

"They let me phone you, Gramps, because you're a hero."

Chet chuckled and was embarrassed and pleased. "Well, it was you giving me all the clues that did it."

"Really?" she asked. "The policeman said it was, but I wanted you to tell me."

"Yes, really. When you come home, we'll talk it all out."

"We're getting another swim-

ming instructor. And, Gramps," she paused.

"What?"

"They sent Janice home."

"I guess they would. She planned with Mark to pretend to be kidnapped because he said if he had enough money he'd take her away to some tropical island."

Alice was standing in the living room doorway with her eyes wide, and Bert was nodding at her in a silent reconveyance of the information.

"I guess her dad is really mad. I'm just —well—"

"Well what?"

"I feel like I tattled on her. I mean by your finding her out."

Chet considered for a moment. "Em, from what the police told me, Mark is not a very nice man. He might not have taken her away. He could have just told her that and then when he got the money he would have taken off and left Janice."

"He was planning to kill her," Bert was whispering to Alice. "They found a packet of crushed pills they assume he would have put in her food after she was of no use to him."

"Think how upset Janice would have been then," Chet said to Emily. "At least this way she'll only be upset for a while."

They all said hello to Emily then, and when they'd hung up Chet went out to the kitchen and messed around in the fridge.

"I'm in shock," Alice was saying.

"All the boiled eggs get eaten?" Chet asked.

"The sandwiches at lunch, remember."

"Oh, I forgot."

"I guess you're allowed to forget, Dad. You're a real hero."

He ducked his head farther into the fridge. His ears were burning.

"I didn't know you had a hankering to be a detective."

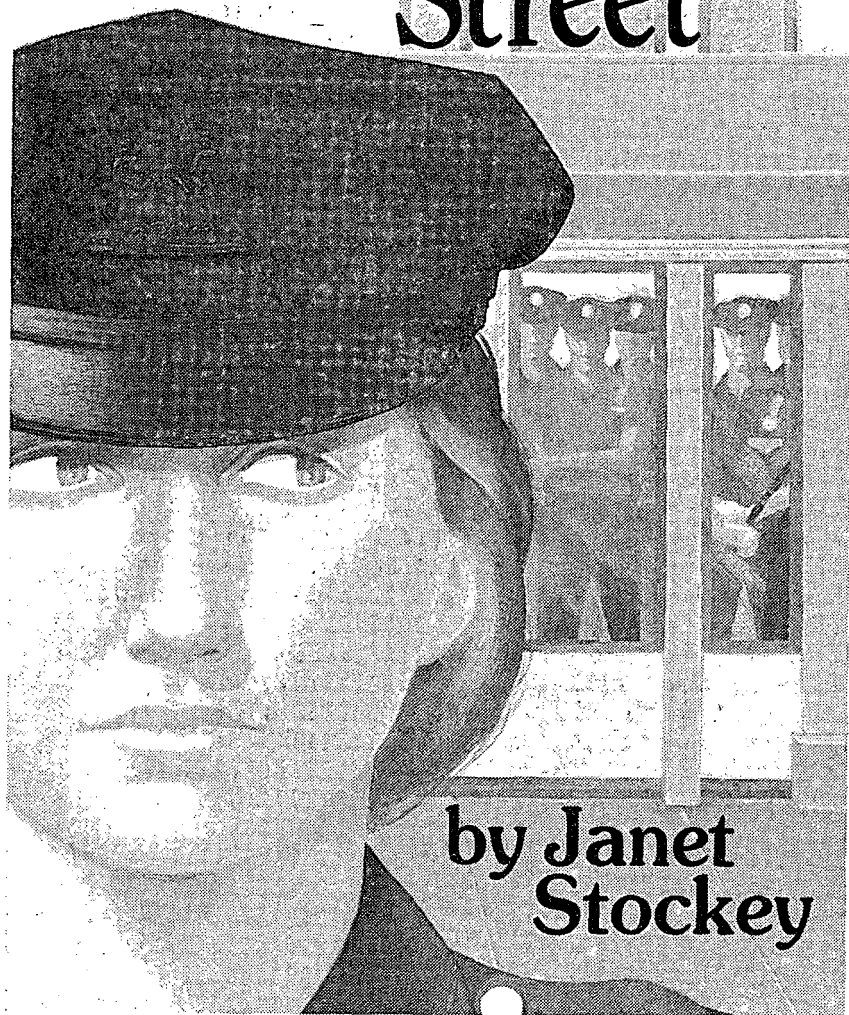
He took a half bowl of Jello out and put it on the counter. With Emily around, it would have been gone in one sitting. "Neither did I. Something to keep me busy in my old age, I guess. Emily thinks it's neat."

"Well," said Alice, "just don't make a habit of it."

"Mmm," he replied, but it wasn't really a promise.

FICTION

Constitution Street



by Janet
Stockey

Illustration by Mark Fresh

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The subject was Washington. Given name: Morris. He was arrested by Thomas (given name: Jeff) and Madison (given name: Martin). They read him his rights, handcuffed him, and put him into the squad car with some rudeness, but no roughness.

At the Constitution Street precinct, Washington waived his right to a lawyer and made a statement. This statement was taken down by Jamie Fitzgeorge.

Fitzgeorge typed as Washington spoke. Washington's statement horrified her. It was a full confession.

He had, he said, robbed seven gas stations and murdered four persons in eleven days. Three of his victims had been gas station employees; one had been a cop. He was, he said, the man they had been looking for; he had no accomplices. He described the robberies and murders, neatly filling in the blanks for the police.

Jamie typed.

Washington spoke of words he had exchanged with his victims, amounts of cash he had obtained in the robberies, where the cash was now, his girlfriend cooking him spaghetti before he went out "to work" and how she never asked what he did. And the dead policeman's blood in his nappy gray hair. He

spoke coldly, tiredly, without pause or inflection, without fear, blood lust, or sorrow. He had a remarkable memory and an organized mind.

Jamie's fingers were cold. She wanted to stop typing and sit on her hands. She had known the dead cop. They all had known him, for he had worked in the Constitution Street precinct with them. His name had been Quentin Bixby. He had been a cop for forty years, and would have retired in five months.

The thought of anyone's having been a cop for forty years intrigued Jamie, who was thirty years old. She always had felt two ways about her job and she did not know how long she would want to keep it. She was afraid of dying young—for herself and for her baby and her husband. She hated to see criminal after criminal go free through plea copping, or through a jury's doubt, or through probation that he would violate within a month.

But she liked being part of the system that slowly, painstakingly, brought just punishment (or help) to a few. She loved returning lost children to their mothers. The mothers would always, always bend over, hug the child, and cry into its hair. They then would say the hair was dirty.

Jamie had made one hundred and twenty-two narcotics arrests. She knew that at least two of those she had arrested had quit taking drugs; this thrilled her.

And she loved arrest.

She had confided this to only three people. One was her husband. One was Jeff Thomas, her best friend at the precinct. And the other was Quentin Bixby.

A lot of people had disliked Bixby; they had called him "that crazy old nigger" because he'd been dry and sharp and cynical. He'd been round and short, with eyes red and a voice whispery from cigarettes. His grim, settled ways had scared Jamie a little at first. She thought he considered her bigoted because she talked so little.

But one day she had talked to Bixby, and ever afterward they had grinned at each other several times a day. He'd been the only person Jamie ever knew who saw arrest as she did.

"It's a ceremony," Bixby had said.

That was how Jamie thought of it. A ceremony. A rite. You met your suspect; you identified yourself, you handcuffed him and read him his rights, you escorted him to the car. It was like a wedding, complete with ritual words that everyone knows. Complete with simple jewelry to seal the pact. And it

was so right, decent, and civilized.

Her friend Jeff Thomas understood every word she said on most subjects, but Bixby had been her special companion in justice. He'd helped her to like her job.

She hated Morris Washington, who had murdered him. She jabbed the typewriter keys. She smelled the ribbon. Morris Washington. Why had he been born? What was it for? Presumably he had killed Bixby to avoid arrest, but why had he killed all those gas station attendants?

"I just got sick and tired" was all he said.

When Washington's statement was ready, Jamie gave it to him to read and to sign. Washington swallowed and his Adam's apple bobbed. He looked at the first page almost pleadingly. Then Jamie knew he couldn't read.

She felt a stab of pity until she remembered who he was. She took the statement and snappishly read it to him. She wasn't thinking of the words on the page, though; she was thinking of the cake she had baked early that morning. *Three eggs*, the cookbook had said, *one-half cup of butter*. Thanks to her first grade teacher, she had been able to make her son a birthday cake.

Jamie got up to leave the room then, touching the bridge of her nose. Jeff Thomas and Martin Madison would handle Washington.

Madison was telling Washington what he thought of him. Jamie despised Madison. She thought him the worst cop she knew. He had been named after Martin Luther King. That, and his skin color, were his only points of resemblance to Dr. King. He was shallow and selfish and cruel in an adolescent way. Jamie was sure he took bribes, but he dared not let even a hint about it drop in Commander Benedict's precinct. Madison discouraged citizens from filing missing-persons reports until they were frantic. If a man were found frozen to death, Madison accused him of being homeless. If a girl were raped, Madison accused her of being pretty, or just of being female. If a wife were battered, Madison accused her of being married.

He accused criminals, too. He met hundreds of thugs, pushers, pimps, robbers, burglars, loan sharks, arsonists, and murderers. He accused them of being fat, bald, dirty, short, arthritic, homosexual, and badly dressed.

He was accusing Morris Washington of being illiterate. Washington began to show signs

of shame and embarrassment. He looked down at his cuffed hands and moved his head from side to side.

Commander Benedict followed Jamie out of the room.

"Some statement," he said.

"Yes," said Jamie.

"Do you have a headache, Jamie?" Benedict asked her.

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Well, take an aspirin. Betsey has some, I think. Isn't Matt's party tonight?"

"Yes, sir."

"Time flies. Well, why don't you go home?"

"Well, I get off in forty minutes anyway, sir."

"So go home. Forty minutes is forty minutes. Don't you have a lot to do?"

"Yes, sir, I do. Thank you, sir."

Benedict actually patted her shoulder. She looked at him. He was a square-built man with smooth white hair and a child's innocent blue eyes. The look she gave him was to tell him that she was a grown woman, that he didn't have to be so condescending. But he could have been worse. She might have worked for somebody downright obnoxious. Benedict was straight and well-respected. His only quirk seemed to be a nostalgia for "the old days." Jamie gathered that the old days were when the mayor and the chief

both were square-built and blue-eyed. In his behavior, though, Benedict had moved with the times.

Jamie found Betsey (who was a splendid typist) hammering away at her own machine at eighty words per minute. Betsey had shown no curiosity about the Gas Station Killer, who had been famous for the past week and a half. Her bleached hair stood nearly on end, and she cracked gum as she typed.

"Yeah?" she said.

"Do you have any aspirin?" asked Jamie.

"I've got these," said Betsey. She opened a drawer, gave Jamie a bottle from it, and started typing again without a word.

It was ibuprofen, not aspirin. Jamie never had taken ibuprofen before, so she read the instructions.

When Jamie got home, she found Bob watching television in their bedroom. Matt was sitting up by his side, trying to eat a plastic monkey-wrench. Jamie kissed both of them—Matt on his hair.

"When's your show?" she asked Bob. He was a stand-up comedian.

"Not till eleven," said Bob. "The cake needs frosting."

Matt was one year old that day. Jamie's parents and Bob's were coming over for a birthday

dinner. Matt was everyone's favorite baby because he was extraordinarily cheerful and attractive. Jamie wondered if he'd grow to be a good man, but she already was proud of him.

"So," said Bob, "I see they caught him."

"Yep. As a matter of fact, Jeff and Madison caught him. I took down the statement. He just admitted everything."

"God. So it looks good?"

"He'll probably get the chair." Their state was one of the few that actually had executions, though never as originally scheduled.

"Well, that's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Jamie.

Matt never touched the ground after his grandparents arrived. He was passed from lap to lap during dinner.

Jamie's mother held her napkin up to her face and turned to Matt, who was on his other grandmother's lap.

"Peek-a-boo. Peek-a-boo," she said, lowering and raising the napkin. Matt laughed hilariously. Jamie loved him so much in that second that she wanted to snatch him away from her mother-in-law and put him on her own lap. She smiled.

Bob said, "I should put him in the audience." Everybody laughed. Bob reminded Jamie a little of Curly Howard. He

was funny in his sleep. He was the only person she loved more than Matt. It was right, she thought, to feel this way.

Jamie was made to tell the story of Washington's booking. She had only taken his statement, but her father looked as pleased as if Jamie had caught him herself. She felt tired. She had risked her life hundreds of times, but her father was proud because she had taken the statement of someone passingly famous.

When their folks had gone home and Matt had gone to sleep, Bob went into the bathroom to get ready for work. He took a radio with him.

Jamie lay on the couch and closed her eyes. She thought of getting up to wash the dishes.

"Hey," said Bob. Jamie woke from a light sleep. "What did you people do?"

"What are you talking about?" said Jamie.

"Your Mr. Washington's lawyer was on the radio saying the police beat a confession out of his client."

"What! He didn't want a lawyer. He didn't have one. And of course nobody beat him."

"Well, he must have changed his mind about the lawyer because I heard the guy myself in a live interview. He says the Constitution Street precinct police beat a confession out of his

client because they can't find the real killer."

"Well, he has to say something, you know. He's playing with no cards," said Jamie. "But I was there for the whole statement, and nobody laid a finger on Washington. In the first place, it never happens with our group because Benedict wouldn't hold with it. In the second place, Washington might be able to get out of it that way, and they all know it. In the third place, if we had the wrong guy, it wouldn't be any use trying to make him confess because the real one would go right on knocking off gas station attendants. In the—"

"The lawyer's name is Glenn Rubin," said Bob. "Do you know him?"

"Yes," said Jamie, a little uneasily. "I do."

"What about him?"

"Seems okay. For a lawyer."

"Well, Jamie, I wouldn't be surprised if they beat him up after you left. You came home early."

"Benedict sent me home. For the birthday party," said Jamie. It sounded ridiculous.

"For the birthday party. Yes. Well, I'd like to know how the lawyer could say all this if Washington isn't even injured. You should ask your friend about it tomorrow." Bob always called Jeff Thomas "your friend."

"It's a court day for me tomorrow," said Jamie.

"Doesn't your friend have to bring Mr. Washington in for arraignment or something?" asked Bob.

Jamie said, "It's his court day anyway. We're having lunch. I'll ask. But it's impossible. Benedict—"

"Never bagged a cop-killer before," said Bob. "You said so."

That night Jamie dreamed of bells. Not of bells ringing, just of bells.

The morning paper had two competing headlines. One read GAS STATION KILLER SEIZED (with a mug shot of Washington) and the other read RACE BAITING HEATS UP IN MAYOR'S RACE. Jamie read the story about Washington. To her dismay, the story had moved quickly to its second page. Glenn Rubin's charge was almost the first thing mentioned.

According to Rubin, the police had beaten Washington with their fists, with a monkey wrench, and with a metal wastebasket. They also had tortured him with an electric cattle prod.

A *cattle prod*? Jamie knew that no such object was in the precinct. Nobody would have dared to anger Benedict by having it around.

She would talk to Jeff. But she wanted to see Morris Washington first. She got to the courthouse as soon as possible and waited.

She had to wait less than a minute. Morris Washington was hustled in rather early. She looked at him. It seemed that Bob had guessed right.

Jeff Thomas already was in a booth when Jamie got to the restaurant. Jeff slumped as he always did, frowning down at his napkin.

"What's been going on?" asked Jamie immediately. She sat down.

"Don't you know yet?" asked Jeff sullenly. He was sullen by nature. His marriage was miserable. He flushed easily, especially around Jamie. He reminded her of a sensitive little boy who stays indoors. They were friends because Jamie was much the same type of person herself. But Jamie's husband kept her laughing.

"What does Benedict say?" asked Jamie.

"To the press? He just denies it. I think he's already scared, though."

"I mean what did he say to the guys?"

"He didn't say anything. We just knew."

Jamie considered this remark.

"I only gave him one punch," said Jeff. "Just to get in, or whatever. Then I left. I didn't want to see that. I didn't want to understand." Jeff was shredding his napkin.

"Understand what?"

"The prod."

"Where the hell did that come from?" asked Jamie.

"What are you talking about? It's the same one."

"What same one?"

"Benedict's—trophy."

"Trophy! What are *you* talking about?"

"It's been in his desk drawer for years. My God, you were there before me and you don't even know? I thought everybody knew. It's from the 'old days.'"

Jamie gawked at him.

"I hated it," said Jeff. "I feel sick as a dog. Everybody hated it, I think, except Benedict and McManigle. But we couldn't get out of it, you know? It was kind of like shooting a sick dog. You hate it, but you—"

"Jeff, you're crazy," said Jamie.

"You don't know. You've had it easy all your life."

Jamie didn't ask what he meant by that.

"McManigle ran off to his wife when he was through," said Jeff. "That's how it was. I don't think anybody could have stopped it. All of us—except

Benedict and McManigle—hated it."

"Even Madison?" asked Jamie.

"Of course Madison hated it," said Jeff.

Jamie gawked again. She said, "But he's such a bastard."

"Well, maybe he's not the broad-minded bastard you think he is," said Jeff. "What will you do?"

"I don't know," said Jamie. "Do you realize that this might wreck the case?"

"Of course I realize it. And we're all scared, you know."

Jamie liked Jeff no less, but she thought of turning them all in. To whom?

"There's a chance nobody will believe Washington," said Jeff. "The public, I mean."

Jamie thought of "taking her case to the public." It seemed risky, unofficial, indecent.

"What will you do?" Jeff asked again. "I just want to get ready for it."

"I don't know," said Jamie. "And I'd be interested to know if you feel you understand Washington any better now."

"What do you mean, understand him?"

"Why he does the things he does."

"Not exactly," said Jeff. He was very red.

"I've got some advice for you," said Jamie. "Next time, tell

them all to go out back and see who can pee the farthest."

That night in bed, she fought with Bob.

"If you do *anything*, you'll get fired," Bob said.

"I'm sick of this job. I don't know why I ever wanted it. I'm going to quit," said Jamie, sitting up.

"Why do you want to quit all of a sudden?"

"I just don't like it."

"If you just wait a little while, you won't be so worried about it."

"That would be terrible," Jamie said.

"There's nothing you can do about it." Bob punched his pillow into shape.

"I don't have to put up with it," Jamie said.

"I'd like to know how old you're going to be when you snap out of it," said Bob.

This went on for forty-five minutes. Jamie went to sleep in tears. It might be a month before her marriage got back to normal.

In the morning she felt hung over, although she was not. She decided to take the day off to think, and possibly to act.

She called Betsey at the station and said she was sick. She paused, then asked Betsey, "Did you ever get to see the suspect?"

"Listen to you," said Betsey. "*Suspect.*"

"Did you see him?"

"No, I didn't see him," said Betsey, "because I left right after you did."

"Why?"

"Benedict sent me home."

"What excuse did he have?"

"No excuse," said Betsey. "He just said, 'I think you should leave, Betsey.' And I left."

"Didn't you wonder what was going on?" asked Jamie.

"Oh, come off it." Betsey gave her an untroubled, disagreeable laugh.

Jamie looked through the paper for any new story about Washington. There was a tiny one, and a large picture, a picture of two women. They were identified as Washington's sister and girlfriend.

The sister was a tall, thin woman who looked straight into the camera and had her hands on her hips. She seemed much older than her brother. No doubt she had played peek-a-boo with little Morris, and he had laughed uncontrollably.

The girlfriend had very red eyes. Jamie could see this even from the black and white photograph.

What could she do? She folded the paper and thrust it onto the kitchen table. She could tell the chief of police. And she could tell the press. Then the chief of police probably would tell the press that Jamie Fitzgeorge was a bribe-taker and a drug addict.

Even if she managed to take action against Benedict and the others, how would she feel? *No worse than I feel now*, she thought. It would ruin their careers. True, but if they were arrested, no one would beat them up. And they were very unlikely to serve any time in prison.

Maybe Jeff and Martin Madison, the most reluctant ones, could cut a deal. But Jeff's marriage would become worse, if that were possible. If his marriage ended, it might be a blessing. And Jamie felt that Jeff was too sensitive to be a cop. As she was. He'd go crazy.

As for Madison, the force would be well rid of him. And Benedict—

Commander Benedict was the most responsible, she thought. They all had swooped down on Washington like buzzards, but a word from Benedict could have stopped them. Instead, he had led them. *A cattle prod*. Had she ever known the man? She had thought his worst sin was that of condescending to his female subordinates.

What would *his* wife say?

Well, what difference did it make? *If people will do such things*, thought Jamie, *they must pay the consequences*. It was how she thought of Washington's legal plight, too.

Oh, must they? Whom could she tell? Washington's attorney

hadn't been able to raise anyone's interest, really. Of course everyone thought he was lying. A doctor would testify at Washington's trial, no doubt, to prove that Washington had been beaten. But so what? That wouldn't be an action against Benedict and Company. It might get Washington off. Two wrongs, not one.

Jamie picked up the newspaper again. The headline read KIRBY'S LEAD NARROWS.

Then she knew what to do.

It might not work, but it was her best hope. Better than all the red tape. To go to Benedict's superior, or straight to the chief of police, would be a bad gamble. They'd find it in their best interests to discredit her. Benedict had a good reputation.

Jamie went downtown to the county building. Here she and Bob had come for their marriage license. It was a big old building, decorated inside with green malachite. New road dust streaked the shiny marble floor. The commuters had brought it in—the thousands of people who worked here. They were "at work" now, in the stories above her head. They were drinking coffee, eating rolls, looking into mirrors, and worrying about their marriages.

Jamie wanted only one of them, the state's attorney, who was the county's chief prosecutor. His name was John Kirby,

he was thirty-seven years old, and he was squeaky-clean in a sanctimonious, self-conscious way. Jamie thought no less of him for it; sanctimony was one of her own shortcomings.

She found the area easily, but she knew it wouldn't be easy to get an interview with the man. He'd very likely be out. And all his workers would do their best to stop her.

She was wearing her uniform; they'd be less likely to think her a random lunatic that way. They'd be afraid of her gun, although she wouldn't touch it.

Jamie opened one glass door. She saw a receptionist. On impulse, she nodded at the receptionist and passed. By some miracle, the receptionist did not stop her.

The next glass door brought her to a row of secretaries in front of a row of wooden doors. She looked toward the corner office. Its door read JOHN J. KIRBY in brass letters. The door was half open. Her heart leaped as she saw a man's shiny wingtip shoe. A man sat on the sofa in Kirby's office reading a newspaper.

"Can I help you?" asked two of the secretaries at once.

One of the secretaries who had spoken was Kirby's own secretary. Jamie looked at her, then looked at the wingtip shoe.

"I want to see Mr. Kirby im-

mediately," she said to the shoe. "I have no appointment, but it's very urgent."

"Mr. Kirby is busy now," said the secretary.

"He is not," said Jamie.

"Of course I am," said a voice. It came from behind her.

She turned around. There was John Kirby.

The man sitting on the sofa in Kirby's office gave in to his curiosity and put down the paper. Jamie thought he looked familiar, but she couldn't place him.

Jamie turned to John Kirby. He looked at her from behind black-framed glasses, younger and plumper than she had thought him.

"How can I help you, officer?" he asked.

Jamie wondered why he was being so polite.

"I have something to tell you," said Jamie. "It concerns a civil rights violation. A—a horrible and blatant civil rights violation, and nobody is doing anything about it."

The man in the office stood up and walked to the door. He looked at Kirby. Kirby looked at him, and then back at Jamie.

"Violent?" Kirby asked.

"Yes—violent. A violent crime that nobody will do anything about." Then she added, "Against a black man."

She realized suddenly that the man in the office was a fa-

mous journalist. Kirby turned to him. "Will you wait out here, please?" he said. Then to Jamie he said, "Come into my office."

The state's attorney was running for mayor.

Washington's blackness wasn't the issue; some of his tormentors and all of his victims had been black. It wasn't a race discrimination case. But it had helped Jamie into Kirby's office.

He was not offended when he learned this. He said nothing about it. After Jamie had spoken for a few minutes, he called in his secretary to take notes, and asked Jamie to start again.

She told him about Washington's being brought in for booking; about his cold, straightforward confession; about how he couldn't read, and Madison's sarcastic comments; about her headache and Matt's birthday cake; about Bob and what he had heard on the radio; about seeing Washington in the courthouse; about her lunch with Jeff and her fight with Bob and her phone call to Betsey.

Kirby took off his glasses and asked his secretary to leave. He held his face in his hands for so long that Jamie thought he had fallen asleep.

"Do you want to make the arrests yourself?" he asked finally.

Jamie's lips were dry. "I never thought of that."

"You *can* do it, I think," said Kirby. "I'll have to check. I'll have to get you some backup, too, naturally. Just a minute." He got up and left the room, closing the door behind him.

Jamie relaxed. Her hands were slippery on the leather arms of the chair.

She wondered how she might like being a waitress. (She had an irrational desire for a job in which she could wear her own clothes, but if she could get past that, she'd try being a waitress.) She was young; she had tact and a phenomenal memory. She thought she'd be a good waitress, and she wouldn't be a hash-slinger for long. She could see herself storming a male bastion in a few years. Standing by a table in a black wool dress with her hands behind her back, leaning forward a little, describing the crayfish sauce with the best French accent in the place. Then she'd drop the accent after a few years.

Her parents would look down on it at first, but so what? She remembered how they had scoffed at *her* becoming a police officer. Quiet, shy Jamie. And now they were so proud of her. Her father would be exasperated at her quitting. And she'd never explain. It would take her about two hundred years to explain. But what of it?

Bob understood already, al-

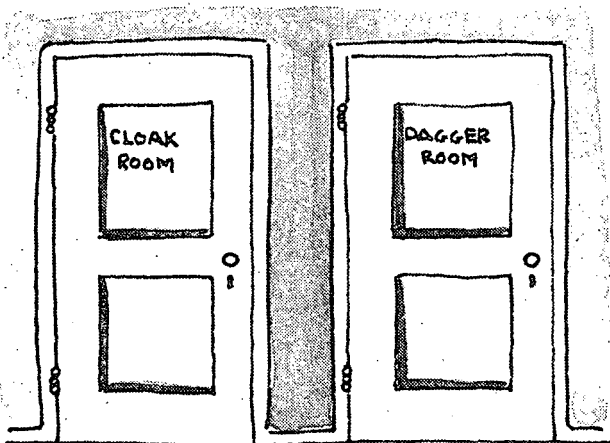
though he pretended he did not. Bob would calm down when she was back in a routine.

She hoped that Morris Washington would die in the electric chair. (He was likely to be phobic about electricity; this bothered her.) She hoped he'd learn to read and write before he died. She hoped his confession wouldn't be thrown out.

She hoped Kirby would say she could arrest Benedict and the others. She imagined

herself walking into Benedict's office on Constitution, followed by strangers. Benedict might have Jeff Thomas sitting with him. Benedict, who always had been kind to her. Jeff, who loved her and whose love she did not return. Jeff would flush and remain silent. He would understand. Benedict would start talking.

But Jamie would cut him off. In the ritual way, she would remind him that he had rights.



UNSOLVED

by
Evelyn Rosenthal

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the Mid-December issue.

During a rain delay, Tony and the other eight members of a baseball team whiled away the time in the dugout by arguing about Bigfoot and UFOs. Opinions varied from the least to the most skeptical on each, and no two of the players agreed completely. In the case of the UFOs, the least skeptical held that they contain aliens from outer space; others said that they are some sort of natural phenomena; the most skeptical called them hoaxes. As for Bigfoot, the least skeptical said that the reported footprints are made by a primitive man; others said that they are made by some large animal, probably a bear; the most skeptical called them hoaxes. From the following clues, can you find each man's full name (one surname is Drake), position on the team, and opinions?

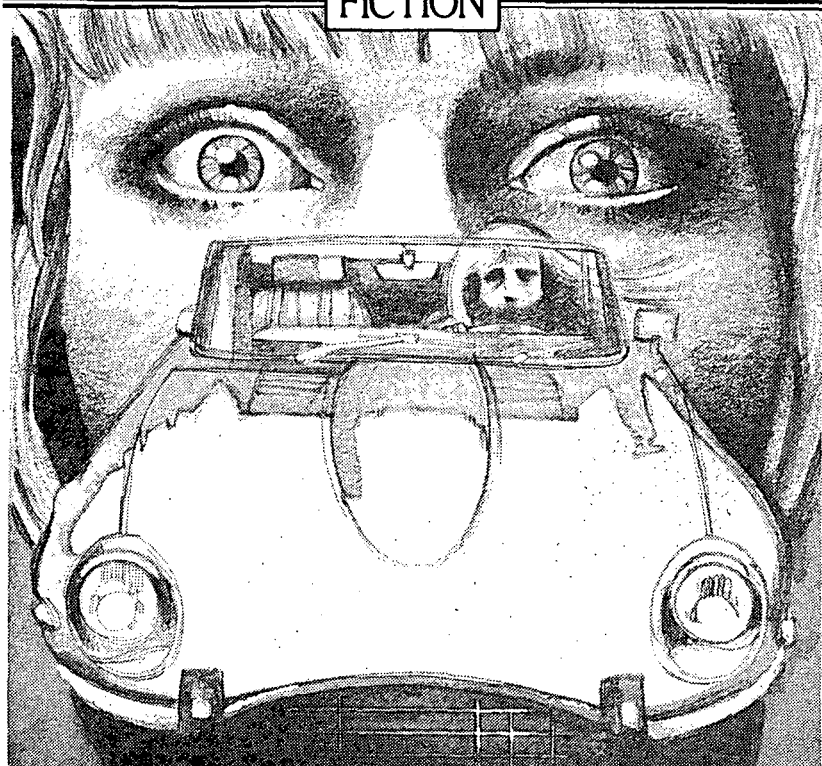
1. None of the three basemen thinks that either is a hoax.
2. None of the three outfielders is the least skeptical about either.
3. Richie, Grange, and the pitcher all agree that Bigfoot is a primitive man.
4. Adams, Sam (who is not Grange), and the catcher all agree about UFOs.
5. The third baseman, and Brown (who is not an outfielder), and Oscar don't agree about either.
6. Evers, Mike, and the right fielder all think that Bigfoot is a large animal; Fulton, Les, and Oscar all think Bigfoot is a hoax.
7. Ken and Harris both agree that the UFOs are natural phenomena; Ned, Clark, and Iles (who is not Phil) all think they are a hoax.
8. The shortstop does not hold either the most or the least skeptical opinion on either Bigfoot or UFOs.
9. The left fielder, right fielder, and third baseman all disagree about both; so do the second baseman, Fulton, and Phil.

See page 111 for the solution to the November puzzle.

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FICTION



It Runs in the Family

by James McKimmey

Illustration by George Thompson

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Not once did I conjecture that sixteen-year-old Cissy Lomax's spending her entire inheritance for only one thing would lead her older sister, Bernice, into committing a crime serious enough to put her in prison. But that is exactly what happened in our little foothills town of Aspen Place, California.

The catalyst triggering the events was the wedding anniversary of the sisters' parents, Harold and Lillian Lomax. Short and round and physically unattractive, a condition that seemed to run in both sides of the family, they were nevertheless liked because of their warmth and gregariousness.

Leaves of aspen and willow had changed to the flaring, deeply saturated yellows of autumn. Apples on the trees of Delicious Hill were ripe for harvesting. And Harold and Lillian, having decided to celebrate their twenty years together over a nice dinner in nearby Sacramento, set out in their small sedan.

Harold, who was probably still thinking about creating new signs—he had trouble mentally leaving his work in his little shop—apparently wasn't paying attention on the freeway going into the city and absentmindedly came up too fast behind a truck. Their car crashed directly into the rear of a semi-trailer rig, abruptly ending their marriage and their lives.

But I should pause here to tell you that my name is Fred Hopkins, or Professor Fred as I got to be known teaching English at the junior college—retired now, sixty-seven years old, five years a widower, and perhaps the most astute observer in our small community. Which is taking a lot of credit because absolutely everyone here spends an inordinate amount of time watching everyone else.

It goes with the small town territory, of course. And I only mention it to lend credence to my method of narration. It's a fact that I wasn't personally present to observe every incident or hear every word. But rest assured that what you read was seen or heard or both by *someone* in the community and came to my ears with what I believe was ninety-seven percent accuracy.

As an example, the scene in Lawson Garvin's office with the Lomax sisters, one afternoon following the funeral of Harold and Lillian, was reported to me in detail by Nora Norton, Lawson's longtime secretary, widowed, and, during the past year, my social companion.

Lawson's First Aspen Place Bank is not only the first but the only bank in town. Lawson had been president and chairman of the board of the institution ever since his father had vacated both positions by retiring.

Nora, a slim and handsome woman capable of dizzying efficiency, had joined Lawson at that same time. Her hair, during her employment, had gone from black to white. Lawson's trust in her was such that he never closed the door between his room and her smaller one. And so she was quite capable of monitoring that meeting with the Lomax sisters simply by sitting at her own desk and being sharply attentive.

Some modern banks furnish their interiors with reasonably authentic-looking Early American decor. Lawson's decor was the real thing, having survived from the region's gold rush days in the middle of the previous century. More than a few visitors had especially admired the massive maple desk around which he and Cissy and Bernice now sat.

Lawson was wearing his usual conservatively cut suit with somber tie and button-down collar, a style of dress learned during his undergraduate years at Harvard. When he spoke with his rich voice, his words still contained a slight Ivy League accent: "I'm sure you girls are concerned about where you now stand financially."

"You got that right," said Bernice.

"I'm extremely concerned, Mr. Garvin," Cissy responded. "I handle several other people's bookkeeping. But I certainly didn't handle my dad's. He just never discussed anything financial with either Bernice or me."

"I suspected that, yes," Lawson said, seeming to look directly at Cissy but focusing instead on some imaginary point just above her dark head.

You must understand that the physical unattractiveness displayed by Cissy's forebears—I once saw one of her aunts for a brief moment and I've never forgotten her—was handed right along to Cissy, and in firm measure. A small girl, Cissy did have a slim, nicely feminine physique. But her face—how do I say it without appearing to be cruelly judgmental on appearance alone?—well, let's just say that God had not been kind.

As a result, during Cissy's younger growing-up years, when children can be most savage, it was more common than not to hear them addressing her as "Hey, Ugly!" What that alone might have done to those of us lesser in spirit and character than Cissy is immeasurable.

But it did not defeat her. She simply returned excessive hostility with excessive affection until her colleagues gradually stopped looking at the outer person and found instead the one that lived

within, a gentle, kind, intelligent individual with a forgiving tendency native to her from the very beginning, despite a handicap that would have downed almost anyone else.

"Mr. Garvin," Nora Norton called from her office, "your son wishes a moment with you, if he may interrupt."

"He must want something," Lawson said with mock irritation. "However, if he insists—"

"I insist," Dale said, moving into the room. "Hello, everyone," he said. He was a tall, muscular, extremely handsome young man in his senior year at the high school. His look grazed swiftly over blonde Bernice's generous, voluptuously shaped body.

"Hey, Dale," said Bernice, giving him her best flirtatious expression, which was a very good one indeed. "You've been making yourself too scarce. Hit the Bluebird Cafe. Make my day, huh?"

"Will do," Dale replied with obvious honesty.

"Hi, Dale," Cissy said. Her expression might have been one of longing, Nora told me.

"Hi there, Cissy," he said with a soft and kind tone. But he wouldn't look at her.

It was true that Cissy did not get the attention of the opposite sex in the same fashion that would have been the case had her countenance matched the rest of her. And those young men who sought her company solely for the satiation of overactive teenage libidos soon found out that they'd chosen the wrong girl.

Nevertheless Cissy, if not a leader in the dating game, still became one of the most popular students ever to attend Aspen Place High, simply because of the generosity of her very nature. An honor student, she put her computer expertise to work at home. Using an inexpensive PC system purchased for her by her family the previous Christmas, Cissy, a high school junior, handled the book-keeping of five local businesses and accomplished it on a part-time basis. She earned enough not only to pay for her own expenses, including clothes, but also to contribute to the family expenses in general.

"My car broke down, Dad," Dale Garvin was saying. His father had given him a sleek little bright red sports car for his seventeenth birthday; Lawson drove what most folks in town considered a limousine. "Had it towed to the garage, and it won't be ready until tomorrow. If I could borrow yours, I'll be here with it to pick you up at quitting time right on the minute, I promise."

"I've heard that promise before."

"This time it'll come true."

"Doubtful," Lawson said, but tossed his keys across his desk to his son.

"Ladies," Dale said, checking out Bernice's bodily attributes again as he left.

"Hit the Bluebird," Bernice called after him.

Yes, and then there was Bernice, in contrast to her younger sister.

God had been more kind here. What you could say about Bernice's features is that they were, simply enough, homely. But if you were a male and viewed her face in conjunction with her body, her homeliness became a secondary estimation at best. Bernice had led in the town's dating game by six lengths. There wasn't a young man in the community who didn't want to find himself alone in a car with her, a desire based on both her God-given looks and her acquired reputation.

Bernice had never done work of any sort in her life. But after barely graduating from high school the preceding June, she'd gotten a job at Irv Atwater's Bluebird Cafe as a waitress.

Only a week later Irv said to me, "Professor Fred, she's cleaned guys right off my competitor's counter and lined them up along mine! They buy coffee just to watch her walk away. If that girl had a knockout face to match that knockout body, plus add on her don't-give-a-damn attitude which heats up guys' blood just on its own—you know, like she'd likely do *anything* should it appeal to her—you'd have a handful you maybe couldn't come close to controlling. But I'm glad it was me she went to work for."

Now Lawson Garvin gently tapped the papers arranged on his desk. "I have here your parents' will, which appoints me the estate's executor. I wish, naturally, that they had been able to buy the house in which you've lived all your lives. But they continued to rent. So—I'm sorry to tell you that they left nothing of real material value to you."

"Damn," said Bernice. Cissy bit a lip.

"But I also have here," Lawson continued, "two insurance policies taken out by your father. One is the car insurance, which will replace the one totaled at the insurance company's estimated value. There is also an accident clause which will pay enough to cover your parents' burial expenses and the cost of the graves where they now reside—I'll take care of those obligations when payment is made by the insurance company, which will be this week."

"Thank God," said Bernice.

"Yes," Cissy whispered.

"The second one is a whole life policy and contains a double-indemnity clause in the event of accidental death. Should your mother not survive your father, as is the case, the face value is to be split between you two girls."

"Now you're talking," Bernice said as Cissy nodded.

"If you'll just sign these papers at the X's," Lawson said, "we'll put things in motion to get both of the monies. I should also have the life insurance payment within the week. Because you are of age in this state, Bernice, you'll be paid your share immediately. Cissy, because you're only sixteen, your share will be placed in trust until your eighteenth birthday. But should there be difficulty in getting along financially, or should there be an emergency—"

"How *much*?" Bernice demanded.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Split?"

"Each."

"*Goddamn*," Bernice whispered.

"Thank you for signing, young ladies. Now—Cissy, you can get to your computer if that's what you do this time of the day. Bernice, you can get back to your job at the Bluebird."

"What job?" Bernice asked.

Bernice didn't give Irv any notice. She just didn't go into his cafe again, and he found out why from me.

What she did do was pair up the automobile insurance payment for the replacement of her parents' car with a hefty piece of her share of the life insurance and bought a sleek little bright red sports car, the exact model as that driven by Dale Garvin. She also started acquiring a voluminous wardrobe of garish clothes that showed off her body far more than was necessary.

In the time following she kept the front passenger seat occupied by a string of eager young men and smoothed the treads of that car's tires as she careened wildly around the county.

Within forty-seven days after she'd received the money, Bernice had spent every cent of it. At that time one of her many boyfriends borrowed her sports car and drove it into the American River where it was hopelessly smashed. The only injury sustained by the boyfriend was Bernice's wrath. Bernice had failed to buy insurance, said to hell with it, and let the car remain in the river.

A day later she was again working behind Irv Atwater's counter.

And then again there was Cissy.

She once more sat beside Lawson Garvin's desk, this time without Bernice.

"It's an emergency," Cissy said calmly. "In regard to the insurance money you put in trust for me."

Lawson nodded knowingly. "Bernice, shall we say, blew her share. Now the two of you don't have enough income on which to live. And you'd like me to—"

"We're okay," Cissy replied confidently. "Bernice got her job at the Bluebird back. I've added another bookkeeping account. We'll get along fine."

"I'm so glad to hear that," said Lawson. "Then what is it that you—"

And just at that point, unfortunately, my social friend and Lawson's longtime secretary, Nora, was interrupted by a phone call and missed a brief exchange of dialogue between Cissy and her employer. The result was that she didn't hear what it was that Cissy needed money for. When she tuned in on them again, Lawson was saying:

"And you would like me to take *all* the money out of trust for you, so that you can spend it *all* on that?"

"Yes, sir," Cissy replied. "I've checked it out. It's payment in advance, for one thing."

"I've heard that, yes," Lawson said, obviously thinking very hard now.

"Don't you think I know what I'm doing?" Cissy asked.

"Now there's the thing," Lawson replied. "I feel very strongly that you do."

Cissy nodded with a flash of triumph in her eyes. "Then you'll get it for me?"

"You've practically already got it."

Cissy, wearing jeans and a yellow sweater and holding a forest green nylon carry-on bag, left town on a Greyhound bus going west. She was gone a month. I'd just parked my car in the business section the day she returned and was walking toward the post office when I saw her coming out of the small bus station.

Well . . . I wasn't sure in the first moments that it really was Cissy. But she was wearing jeans and a yellow sweater and carrying a forest green bag. She certainly looked like Cissy in every way.

Except her face.

This girl meeting me on the sidewalk had one of the most gorgeous faces I'd ever seen.

As we stopped, looking at one another, the girl said in what was undeniably Cissy's voice, "That's right, Professor Fred, it's I."

Grammatically correct, as Cissy would be.

I shook my head in wonderment. "Cissy . . . you are totally stunning!"

"Good! I'm glad to hear you say it. And I hope everyone else says the same thing. Because that's what I wanted and that's what I paid to get."

Cosmetic surgery, of course. I understood that immediately. I stood there examining her face in the sunlight. I saw that she was wearing skillfully applied makeup. It would, of course, hide any faint evidence lingering from the surgery.

I now realized just how mature this teenager really was. She'd looked at a windfall with completely objective judgment, matched it to one of the most rapidly developing specialties in modern medical science, and chosen a course of action that would be best for her particular life.

"If you care at all to know, Cissy," I said to her, "I'm a hundred percent behind what you've done."

"I do care," she replied, "and I hope everyone else is, too."

Everyone was, of course . . . except Bernice. It wasn't that Bernice didn't want happiness for her sister. It was just that quite abruptly the roles of the two young women were reversed.

If Bernice had once led in Aspen Place's dating game, Cissy now went out front by twelve lengths.

Even those men who had so eagerly gone to Irv Atwater's counter when Bernice was behind it seemed to lose interest in her. It might have been making a new comparison between the sisters, with Bernice coming out a homely second place.

On the other hand it might have been, too, that Bernice lost her personal charm in direct proportion to Cissy's soaring popularity. She became grouchy and sullen with her customers, slapping down Irv's heavy white dishes so that coffee sloshed from cups into saucers.

Then when all of Cissy's dating quite suddenly narrowed down to one boy, Dale Garvin, the banker's son, the situation seemed even to worsen. Because it was apparent now where things were heading as we all watched Dale driving Cissy around in that little bright red sports car. Cissy and Dale appeared to be entirely devoted to one another. And it seemed inevitable that it would stay

that way during the coming years, so that one day Cissy would become a part of the very wealthy Lawson Garvin family.

Irv Atwater, from his cafe's kitchen, overheard the first public quarrel between Bernice and Cissy ever to erupt in our town.

"Why not me too?" Bernice asked her sister with anger and frustration.

"You could have," Cissy responded.

Bernice was silent, apparently thinking of some way to hurt her sister over this injustice. "What do you think your kids are going to look like? It runs in the family, you know. Even if Dale Garvin turns out to be the father!"

"If Dale turns out to be the father, they can do what I did, can't they?" The implication was clear that there would be plenty of money to do it. It was a solid reaffirmation of the old adage that if you have enough money, you can get almost anything done.

"Why don't I have the money to do it?" Bernice asked, as though she'd forgotten what she'd done with her inheritance.

Cissy reminded her. "You wanted the car instead."

"Like the one you're riding around in all the time these days!"

"Is it my fault Dale already owned a car just like the one you bought?"

There was a pause, then Bernice said loudly, with total unreasonableness, "Yes!"

It was Nora, of course, who overheard what was said when Bernice went in to see Lawson Garvin in his office.

Bernice was shouting when she said, "I don't see why not!"

"It's not the same as it was with Cissy, Bernice, and I don't see why you can't understand that."

"You gave it to her, why not to me?"

"I didn't give it to her. I advanced to her what was already hers."

"Well, then, advance the money to me, too!"

"But you have nothing to advance against. You spent all of your share."

"Damn," Bernice countered.

It was just too much for her.

And I realized just how much the day I went into Lawson Garvin's bank to cash my latest Social Security check.

It was about two o'clock, the slowest time here for customers. Nora was at her desk. I could see Lawson at his desk through the open doorway. Young Sandy Baylor was behind the single teller's

window that was open. I was filling out a deposit slip at a lobby counter.

The figure came in through the front door, fast, wearing a yellow Halloween mask and holding a revolver in one hand, a large white plastic sack like that used by the grocery store in the other.

"Freeze!" said the masked person in what was unquestionably Bernice's voice.

I did, staring at her in disbelief. Then I saw Lawson getting up from his desk and coming out to say, "What the devil do you think you're doing, Bernice?"

"What the devil do you think?" Bernice asked behind her mask. She dropped the plastic sack in front of Sandy and said, "Fill it up!"

"This is a desperately miscalculated action on your part, Bernice, if there ever was one."

"Call it what the hell you want. Hurry up, Sandy!"

"Don't you realize I have a burglar alarm installed in here, Bernice? It's ringing in the sheriff's office right now. They'll be here in seconds."

"Bull. It's on the fritz. It won't be fixed until Thursday when the repair guy gets here."

I believed her. Dale Garvin probably mentioned the matter in passing to Cissy. Cissy probably mentioned it in passing to Bernice. It might very well have provided the final motivation for Bernice.

"That's all I've got," Sandy said, having placed all the currency from her drawer in the sack.

"How much?" Bernice demanded.

"I didn't count. Quit pointing that thing at me."

"Ball park!"

"Five thousand."

"Not enough. Get some more out of the vault, Garvin," she ordered the banker. "Quite a lot more."

Lawson Garvin twirled a combination wheel and disappeared into the vault.

I don't know what made me say it, but I said, "Do you want my Social Security payment, too, Bernice?"

"Have you turned it into cash or is it still a check?"

"Check."

"Forget it."

I finally noticed that there was a car idling outside. Then Lawson came out with banded stacks of currency and put them in the plastic bag.

"How much?" Bernice demanded again.

"Twenty thousand."

"Good enough. Everybody face down on the floor. Stay that way for five minutes, or I'll come back and blow you to by God smithereens."

We lay on the floor as that engine outside roared into action.

"She got away with it, didn't she, Professor Fred?" Lawson said from the floor on the other side of the teller's cage.

"I'm afraid it would appear so, Lawson."

Several people identified the car Bernice had driven into town, apparently alone, as a dark blue two-door sedan with California plates. The car was found abandoned a mile out of town and was identified as having been stolen from an adjoining town.

The sheriff conjectured about whether Bernice had really been alone in stealing that car and driving into Aspen Place to rob Lawson Garvin's bank. Since she'd disappeared without a trace after abandoning the stolen car, he decided that she'd had assistance, probably from one of the many boyfriends she'd had during that period when she'd spent all of her inheritance. They must have gone on in his vehicle.

No matter, the sheriff said, after interviewing everyone. They knew what to look for. They would find her in no time.

They did. She walked into a small market in San Francisco's Tenderloin District to buy groceries a week later. A street cop saw the swollen bruises of a person who'd just had facial surgery. It was what they were looking for.

She was being held in jail in San Francisco, to be transferred back to Aspen Place, when I stepped into Irv Atwater's cafe one late morning. Irv was behind the counter as I sat down on a stool. I said, "Your latest waitress quit?"

"I'll find another," he said with resignation. "It's that I don't pay enough for the work involved, but it's all I can afford. Coffee, Professor Fred?" The coffee was strongly bitter from having been brewed hours before. But I was there for company and conversation.

"Bernice'll be in our jail pretty soon," Irv said.

"Tomorrow, I hear."

"The bruises and swelling might be gone by then."

"Makeup'll help."

"Professor Fred, if a jury finds her guilty, she'll sure enough go to prison."

"How can they not find her guilty? Four of us will testify to it."

"Big price to pay for a new face."

"Maybe she thinks it was worth it. I kind of believe she does."

Irv shook his head. "Like I told you, if that girl had a knockout face to match that knockout body, plus add on her don't-give-a-damn attitude like she'd likely do *anything*, well . . . she's no doubt got the knockout face now, and if her robbing the bank doesn't prove she'll do *anything*, and . . . what I'm trying to say is that from now on out she's going to be a *real* handful all right."

"I can't argue with that."

He was smiling now. "You know, Professor Fred, I can't hardly wait to see her."

I nodded and sipped bitter coffee and said, "I can't either."

SOLUTION TO THE NOVEMBER "UNSOLVED":

1. Yes, judging by the half-finished meal at the table, and by the fact that he kept his napkin on.

2. Hans's, because they come from the table where he was eating.

3. Yes, judging by the footprints.

4. Yes, because he stopped at the napkin holder, and there are two wrapped and half-eaten pickles on the counter.

5. Yes, because Hans offered Georgio a pickle.

6. No. Footprints would have indicated his return.

7. Yes, because the approximate amount of the debt is there on the counter, and it is unlikely that they would have argued over eight cents.

8. No. There is no indication that he carried a weapon or did anything other than proffer fifteen dollars.

9. Yes. Hans left his table with a knife in his hand, and was still

holding it when he was killed. He may well have brandished it and threatened with it during the course of the argument.

10. From the roast, because the hilt of the knife matches the hilt of the fork which is still in the roast.

11. No. As a storekeeper he must have been given torn bills many times and he was used to accepting them, provided all the pieces were there, as they were in this case.

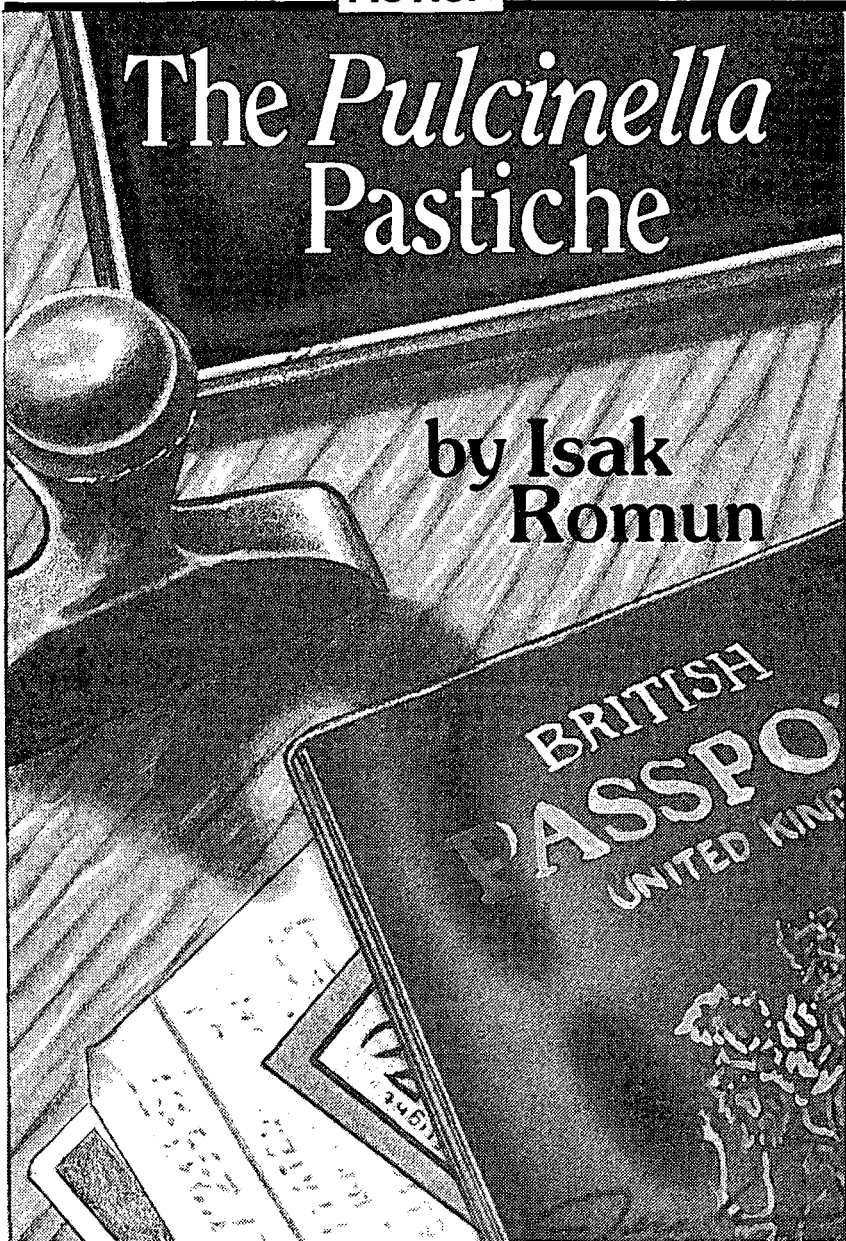
12. The ten dollar bill, which was counterfeit and a bad one at that. It showed a portrait of Andrew Jackson instead of that of Alexander Hamilton.

The secret service, following up on the counterfeit trail, discovered that a demented counterfeiter with a fixation on Jackson had engraved the bills. They were almost perfect otherwise. The moral is, know your presidents.

FICTION

The *Pulcinella* Pastiche

by Isak
Romun



“Welcome home,” Flinn said. “When didja get back?”

“I returned today, mid-afternoon,” Arthur Darriven answered. “You’re late. Whatever happened to morning delivery? I suppose you have something for me, or would you rather chat a bit more?”

“Four days’ backup,” Flinn said, handing Darriven three packets of mail. Darriven turned, put the packets on a chair just inside the front door. When he faced back to Flinn to ask if there was anything else, the mailman handed him a single item. “Your English buddy is writing again.”

Darriven looked up from the squarish envelope marked across its face with two blue crayoned lines at right angles to each other. He said, “It’s rather nice to have a preview of my mail before I open it.”

“Now don’t get uppity, professor,” Flinn replied. “I know ’cause you have to sign for it.” He tapped the blue-crossed envelope.

“Why?”

“It’s registered.”

“There’s no registration label, no registration number.”

“Must of fell off,” Flinn explained. “See those blue lines?” Darriven nodded. “They mean it’s a registered letter. Besides,

look at the other side. There’s a return receipt there.”

Darriven turned over the envelope. He saw on its back a pink U.S. Postal Service card-form. He read its title (“Return Receipt for International Insured or Registered Mail”), signed in the “Received” space, tore off the card at its perforations, and handed it back to Flinn. As he did, he noted Julius Weckam’s name and return address neatly printed on the other side.

“Anyone could have drawn those lines,” Darriven said, pointing to the crayoned cross on the envelope.

“No, the Brit P.O. put ’em there. In the old days, registered mail over there used to be bundled and tied with blue ribbon. Those blue lines are a harking back to them days.”

“It’s stimulating,” Darriven said, “to be served by well-informed people. Even unto the minions of the postal service.”

“I need your John Hancock one more time,” Flinn said. “Just sign.” He shoved a receipt book in Darriven’s direction while muttering under his breath something about how you didn’t have to have a Ph.D. to know a thing or two about a thing or two. And because you didn’t have a Ph.D. didn’t mean you liked being called a minnow.

"Anything interesting?" Viveka asked Darriven as he, holding the mail, entered the study. She was sitting at a word processor punching into it the last entry in an inventory of William Byrd's virginal pieces. Then she typed "byrd" across the top of the screen and touched the return key. The title disappeared, replaced by the question "Replace File?" She hit the Y key, settled back in her chair, and looked over at Darriven, who was now behind his desk examining the unopened Weckam envelope. She repeated her question.

"A registered letter from Julius Weckam," he answered, then asked, "How are you coming?"

"I'm all the way through B. Perhaps by the end of the next century's first decade, my students will be calling me Dr. Hussey. Why don't you open it?"

"I intend to," Darriven said. "Just one thing."

"What's that?"

"The envelope. It's not written in his hand."

"And you're afraid something's wrong."

"Julius is getting on—"

"Arthur, don't be so morbid. Open the envelope. Julius is my friend, too. If there's anything wrong, I'd like to know about it." The processor beeped, in-

dicating the Byrd inventory was filed.

Darriven worked the middle desk drawer, pulled out an opener, slit the envelope, and took from it two sheets of crisp notepaper written on both sides in large script. He unfolded the sheets, slowly read them. At the start, he was frowning, his features deeply furrowed. When he came to the end of the letter, though, the frown was off his face and the skin of his forehead was smoothed into hair-thin creases.

Viveka nodded at him. "Well, that tells me he's okay. What does he say?"

"He doesn't say anything, you see. The letter's written by Marta. First time she's ever written me. He asked her to write. Tell me what's going on. He's too busy."

"Doing what?"

"Getting ready to go to Italy."

"They love to travel. Remember their Continental bike tour? Last year. And the year before, didn't he guest-speak at National University in Taipei?"

"It's not where they're going that intrigues me. It's why."

"Well, what's the why?"

"To charge a windmill I helped build."

"And this is good?"

"As I think on it," he said, "it may be bad. Very bad." He put the frown back on his face.

Viveka came over the next morning to prepare breakfast for Darriven before giving her first class. She dropped her pocket-book on a dining room chair, went into the kitchen. She found Darriven there. On the table in the center of the room were a number of books. He was going through one of them.

"A little unusual for you, isn't it?" she asked as she put on an apron. "You, in the kitchen." She picked up one of the books. "A cookbook. I can't believe it."

Darriven exasperatedly dropped the book he had been examining. "We'll have a guest any moment now."

"You invited someone for breakfast?"

"No, you did."

"I?"

Darriven looked closely at Viveka. "You met Brosnan yesterday. Did you tell him about the letter I got from Marta Weckam?"

"Well, yes."

"And about Weckam's efforts to reinstate Pergolesi as the composer of that discredited trio sonata? The *Pulcinella* pastiche?"

"Yes, but—"

"And my suspicions about this whole affair?"

"Yes, damn it, yes!" she said firmly and, he saw, defiantly.

"Fine. Just fine." Darriven threw up his hands and walked around the table. There was an edge in his voice. "Except now I have Brosnan and his big Irish nose in my business. He called, by the way. He's our breakfast guest."

"He only wants to help."

"Fine. Nothing wrong with help. I cherish help. But at this moment I'm not even sure I need it."

Viveka went to the refrigerator, opened it, contemplated its bulging shelves. "We have plenty of food. Plenty. I shopped yesterday." She stopped, took a package of bacon from the refrigerator before going on. "You didn't find it, then?"

"Find what?"

"A specimen of Marta's handwriting. You probably remembered something as mundane as a long-ago exchange of recipes between Marta and Betty." Darriven looked down at the sound of his divorced wife's name. Viveka continued, "That's why you're looking in the cookbooks, hoping you'll find it between the pages of one of them."

"I have a police detective coming to breakfast. Do I need a resident one underfoot?"

"You want me to go? After I cook?"

He answered, his voice considerably softened, "No, of course not. I suppose there's no real

harm in Brosnan's coming over."

As if prearranged, the doorbell rang. Darriven left the kitchen, walked the length of the hall to the front door, and let Brosnan in.

"I don't guess anyone'll mind if I finish off these suckers," Brosnan said and, without waiting for a response, dumped a mound of scrambled eggs from platter to plate. He looked over at Viveka as he replaced the platter in the middle of the table. "Nice, very nice," he said without specifying whether he had Viveka or the eggs in mind. "There's some bacon left," Viveka pointed out.

"It is the way I like it, crisp and hard."

"The way you like it?" Darriven remarked testily. "Edible, you mean."

Viveka slid the bacon onto Brosnan's crowded plate and added a biscuit, the last biscuit, from a wicker basket. She pushed the butter close to the plate.

The three of them—Darriven, Brosnan, and Viveka—were in the dining room, a bright place characterized by crisp linen, polished furniture, shining cutlery. The sun strode through a side window reflecting off the last two, filling the room with an illusion of cheeriness not shared by Darriven.

"So, then, as I understand it, Arthur," Brosnan said after a while as he gazed ruefully at the last of the eggs rising to his mouth. He chewed, swallowed, massaged his mouth with a napkin, and started again. "Yeah, well, as I get it, you're worried something has happened or is happening to your friend—what's his name?"

"Weckam. Julius Weckam. And his wife Marta. I feel helpless. England so far away. And besides, they're not there."

"How do you know?"

"I called last night. No answer. They're probably on their way to Italy or there already. If that's really where they're heading."

"What makes you think they may not be?" Brosnan asked.

Darriven turned to Viveka. "You know them. Marta, how would you describe her? What sort of person is she?"

Viveka moved, causing her sleek black hair to fall off her shoulders and onto her back. Darriven watched as her features flickered almost imperceptibly into attitudes of thought. She raised her head, her chin slightly up as if sighting a single faraway cloud in a limitless sky. When she did this, the span of skin between chin and collarbone stretched, became an expanse of soft, slightly pulsing whiteness. It occurred to Darriven then, as

it always occurred to him when he saw her this way, assembling memories, that if he could lock into the type of question that triggered this image of her, he would ask it again and again.

After some seconds of silence Viveka spoke.

"Marta Weckam, devoted, loyal, at Julius's beck and call. A typical *hausfrau*. He met her in Germany, right?" Darriven nodded. Viveka went on. "Intelligent, not intellectual. Almost as if Julius didn't want a mate to share in his work, even peripherally. As if desiring nurture more than stimulation."

"Exactly," Darriven said. "And this," he brandished the letter received the day before. "Even with Julius telling her what to write, she couldn't have put it down just that way. The way this letter is written points to a knowledge Marta doesn't have or couldn't express in this manner."

"That's it?" Brosnan asked. "She writes an intelligent letter and you think there's something wrong? She didn't write the letter?"

"I've been looking around here for a sample of her handwriting. I haven't been successful."

Viveka went over to the chair on which her pocketbook lay. She took from it an index card. "I found it," she said, handing

the card to Darriven, "when I was making breakfast. I didn't want to give it to you till you'd eaten." The card was filled with tight, cramped handwriting setting forth the ingredients and sequence of preparation for something called doughhead biscuits.

Darriven put the card next to the letter, and said softly, "The handwriting's not the same." He turned to Brosnan. "There you are. Somebody wrote that letter and signed Marta's name thinking I wouldn't know her handwriting."

"Wait, Arthur," Brosnan said. "When I met Viv yesterday, we both had business someplace else. I don't have the full story. And this morning—well, the eggs and bacon got in the way." Brosnan fished inside his coat. "So, look, I'm bringing out the notebook. Fill it up!"

Darriven held up the letter and its envelope, dropped them in front of Brosnan. He shoved the recipe card over to the detective. "I got that letter, registered with return receipt, yesterday. Almost immediately I was struck by its strangeness. The tone and penetration of content were not Marta's. We know why this morning. She didn't write it."

"You were right to be suspicious," Brosnan said. "Look at the cancellation." He raised the envelope.

"There's nothing to see," Viveka said. "It's all smeared."

"Exactly. And something else, it doesn't look like a British cancellation. They're larger. The envelope was struck and the handstamp twisted to right and left to create the smear. That way, no printing you can read. The lab could probably raise the letters."

Darriven held up a hand. "Wait, what you're saying is that someone somewhere got a British stamp and put it on a British envelope—I know it's British, or Continental anyway, because it's bigger than American letter envelopes—crayoned a cross on it, hand-struck it, and used it to send a letter to me?"

"Not only that," Brosnan said, holding the letter against the window light, "whoever wrote this must have thought you stupid. This watermark shows what I think are Chinese ideographs. I suppose you could get an Oriental paper in England, but I kind of doubt it's in general use."

"The paper is—"

"—not British," Brosnan finished. "One more thing. Notice how even this paper is on three of its sides, but not on the fourth side."

"Meaning?"

"The paper was cut, probably with scissors at its top."

"Why?"

"To remove a letterhead."

"What's going on here?" Darriven asked, looking first at Brosnan, then at Viveka.

Viveka shrugged her shoulders before she got up from the table. "Whatever it is, Arthur dear, it can't keep me here a moment longer. My students are dying to hear my reasons for recommending they take up accordion instead of piano." She looked down at Brosnan. "Read the letter. Then make sure he tells you about the Pergolesi sonata. His part—and Julius's—in that research." She untied her apron, removed a lace-edged handkerchief from its pocket, then lifted the garment off over her head. "Leave the dishes," she told Darriven. "I'll do them tonight when I come over."

"I got this much," Brosnan said. "Some time back you and friend Julius were among the—what do you call them, musical detectives?"

"Musicologist is one name," Darriven replied, "or musical historian. Take your pick."

"Yeah. You, Weckam, and the rest of the bunch researched some music by this—" Brosnan glanced at the letter—"Giovanni Battista Pergolesi. You found he hadn't written the music. Now Weckam wants to reverse himself and prove it was written by Pergolesi."

"That's what the letter says,

which we know wasn't written by either Weckam. The music, by the way, is the first in a set of trio sonatas. The opening movement was used by Stravinsky for his ballet *Pulcinella*. Stravinsky thought he was lifting genuine eighteenth century Pergolesi. He wasn't, though. Stravinsky was really using music composed by an obscure Venetian, Domenico Gallo, who lived some time after Pergolesi."

"That couldn't have made Signor Gallo very happy," Brosnan observed. "I mean, having his stuff appropriated by the memory of another guy."

Darriven made a negligent gesture. "Good ol' Domenico might have done it purposely. Back then, the idea was to sell, and if Pergolesi's name on a bunch of trio sonatas brought in more money than Gallo's, then Pergolesi's name went on them. It's nothing unusual. After Haydn's death, there were all sorts of things surfacing, purportedly by him. We know Mozart's second symphony is by someone else, and I take with a grain of salt the new Mozart symphonies and Bach chorale preludes being *discovered* these days."

"So what are you saying?"

"One of the things I'm saying," Darriven pointed out, "is that Julius Weckam was knee-deep in that research. We proved

conclusively that Gallo, not Pergolesi, was the composer of that trio sonata. A turnaround by Julius is simply astounding, inconceivable, not credible. It's a cover story used by someone who even now may be holding Julius and Marta."

"Well, what was the point of a cover story anyway?"

"They—whoever now has the Weckams—probably knew Julius and I kept in pretty close touch. Julius wouldn't take off for a prolonged period without at least mentioning it in a letter and telling me what he was about. No, that letter was written by someone who wanted to put my mind at ease in case I should try to contact Julius for one thing or another. The subject might have been suggested by Julius himself."

"What for?"

"Don't you see?" Darriven's voice rose. "Julius didn't want to put me at ease. He wanted to alert me that something was wrong, terribly wrong."

"Like kidnapping?"

"I'm afraid so. Though why I can't imagine."

Brosnan picked up the Weckam letter and its envelope, put them in his inside coat pocket. "Look, I'll take these things downtown and have our lab people look at them. I'll either call or be back later."

"Why not come to dinner?" Darriven asked. "Looking at

that icebox, she's bought enough to feed a large ape."

"I resent that reference and, to get even, accept your invitation."

They were back together around five thirty that afternoon, a half-hour or so before dinner. Brosnan had just come in and dropped into the upholstered chair in front of Darriven's desk. Darriven was at the desk facing slightly away from Brosnan. He had a stare on his face that folded back upon itself. Released, it might show him the outside world, for his eyes were on an angled line with the study's street window. Viveka was in and out of the study, bringing drinks, checking the food cooking in the kitchen. When Brosnan came in, she asked him what he'd have. He said beer. She left to get it.

Without looking at the detective, Darriven said, "I thought you drank ginger ale when you were on a case."

"I do, but this is your case, not mine."

"I see."

Viveka came in, handed Brosnan a poured beer. Brosnan drank off the beer, handed the glass back to Viveka. She took off on another trip to the kitchen. She returned with a refill, gave it to Brosnan, went to the processor chair, and sat.

She didn't start up the machine, just sat and looked expectantly at Brosnan.

"What's cooking?" Brosnan asked.

"Macedoine salad, tomato consomme, rib roast, Yorkshire pudding, potatoes roasted in the pan with the meat, cauliflower topped with a cheese sauce. Other things."

Darriven smiled and, still without turning, said, "Yes, Hector Aloysius Brosnan, what's cooking?"

Brosnan took out his notebook. The Weckam letter and envelope were between its pages.

"Lots," Brosnan said. "The lab managed to come up with a reading of the cancellation. Hong Kong."

"The stamp was British, United Kingdom," Darriven said to the window. "Hong Kong has its own stamps."

"I suppose a U.K. stamp is good in Hong Kong. Or else the postal clerk didn't notice. Or he didn't care, since he was putting that smeared cancel on the envelope for someone anyway. I mean, he was part of the scheme. So, if he went along with the cancel, he'd go along with the stamp. The stamp is important. Its job was to make you believe the Weckams were in England when the letter was mailed."

Darriven faced around. "Do you mean to tell me Julius and

Marta were kidnapped in England and then transported to Hong Kong?"

"I think we can rule out kidnapping at this point."

"Why are we ruling it out, Heck?" This was Viveka.

"Because," Brosnan explained, "they got Hong Kong visas in England, and once they got to Hong Kong they got new visas."

"For where?"

"The Chinese mainland."

Darriven objected. "Come on. In this day and age, they could have gotten those visas in England."

"Yeah, but maybe they didn't want to. Maybe they didn't want anyone to know where they would eventually end up."

"What are you saying?"

"Defection."

Darriven laughed and, from her position behind Brosnan, Viveka smiled uneasily.

"A musicologist and his dumpy *Frau*?" Darriven asked when he'd stopped laughing. "Julius is not a political animal. I imagine there are very few politicized musicologists."

"Look," Brosnan pointed out, "I'm just telling you what I got. Their mainland airfares, by the way, are just one way."

"I've thought about nothing but this affair since you left this morning. I think they're somewhere else. Not Hong Kong. Not China."

"Are you so smart you know more than the police?"

Darriven turned away from Brosnan, resumed his previous position behind the desk. "Yes."

Viveka stood, a nervous half-smile on her face. "I'd better check the food. We eat at five past six."

When Viveka left the study, Brosnan stood, put his hands on the desk surface, and, leaning over it, glared at Darriven's profile. "Okay, Arthur, if you're so smart, do you know where the Weckams are?"

"I do."

"Do you mind telling me?"

"Certainly not." Darriven looked at his watch. "Almost six."

"Then where?"

"Probably two or three seconds from ringing my front doorbell."

The doorbell rang.

"Will you get it, Arthur?" Viveka called from the kitchen. "My hands are full here."

"My pleasure," Darriven said and got up from the desk.

The house was empty except for Viveka and Darriven. The Weckams had come, eaten, talked at length, and gone back to their hotel, promising to move into, at Darriven's urging, the house's guest room tomorrow. Everything was cleaned up. Marta had pitched in, pushing the

men, who had made half-hearted offers to help, out of the dining room and into the study.

Throughout the meal and afterwards Darriven steadfastly declined to tell how he knew the Weckams were in the United States instead of a world away in China. Brosnan left soon after dinner, a bit roiled because he couldn't draw Darriven out. The Weckams stayed an hour or so longer, then left.

Now Viveka and Darriven sat in the study, he at the word processor, she at the desk. She was sitting at the same angle, looking at the street window, as Darriven had been earlier. Before moving to the desk, during an interval when Darriven was out in the kitchen getting drinks, she had been at the processor working on her doctoral research. The screen showed a new listing of virginal pieces. The file title was "carleton." When Darriven came back with his drink, he seemed surprised to find Viveka in his chair. He didn't say anything, though. Instead, after placing her drink on the desk, he went over to the processor and sat down. He glanced at the screen.

"Nicholas Carleton," he murmured, "chorister, virginalist, and, incidentally, composer. You're into the C's, then."

"After Byrd, there's very little more you can do in the B's. Well?"

"Well what?"

"I can understand your putting off the Weckams till tomorrow. I can even understand putting off Hector forever. Your little game of get even. But I want to know now. I won't leave until I know."

"Thereby encouraging my reticence." He smiled over at her, met bemused firmness. "All right then, I'll tell. I can refuse you nothing."

"That's a hot one!" Viveka cried.

"Let's take the mail first," Darriven began, "delivered late, by the way, as if Flinn wanted to make certain I paid heed to that fake registered letter sans registry label. You must have used your charms on him. He might have been able to fool me if he had not used a U.S. form instead of a British one for the return receipt. The receipt form is initiated by the sending post office, not the receiving office. The U.S. form is used on mail going *out* of the country, not coming *into* it. The stamp, the envelope, the paper. Well, the Weckams supplied those. Not unusual for overseas visitors to have them on hand. The paper, of course, dates from Julius's Taipei sojourn. Cutting off the letterhead is explained by the fact that Taiwan is not a customary entry point for mainland China. Of course, all this occurred to me well afterwards,

when Brosnan left earlier today and I had a chance to think. The Weckams showed up a day or so ago, intent on surprising me with their visit to the States, only to find I was off on a trip myself. Right?"

Viveka nodded.

"So, after me, who should they get in touch with? Why, that nice piano and theory teacher at Paulsburg College. Somehow or other, the idea of setting up a little charade with the purpose of testing my overtaxed deductive powers came up. Using the *Pulcinella* pastiche, as I call it, as a centerpiece probably came from Julius. That was the first unsettling item I had to deal with. Julius's turnaround. Not believable! And yet not enough to let me see through the whole thing. I suppose you suggested enlisting Brosnan, a further thrust toward credibility."

Darriven looked over at Viveka. "So far, so good," she said.

"Ah, but it got better. Brosnan's little fictions. Defection. Mainland China. The trail of deception supposedly fabricated by the Weckams. The smeared cancellation. Another task for Flinn? And you, my dear, dropped some clues."

"I?" Viveka seemed surprised. "I thought I was pretty good. Just name your so-called clues."

"Well, there's the icebox."

"The icebox? Oh, the refrigerator. What could a refrigerator tell you?"

"Plenty. And that's what you had in it—plenty. Enough to feed an army division. Certainly more than needed—unless the person who did the shopping knew there'd be additional people for dinner. That menu! An American's idea of a British meal. And then your general demeanor in the face of the possible peril of two friends. You couldn't wait to get off to class. Even made an inappropriate, under the circumstances, piano-accordion remark."

"And I thought I was letter perfect."

"That letter. Who wrote it? Brosnan?"

"No, one of my students. Another student wrote out the recipe card."

"Ah, the recipe for dough-head biscuits. It appears you anticipated me there. Or was I anticipating you? You must have been overjoyed to see me looking for something you'd prepared before you ever came into the house this morning. Credibility again. But the way you used the recipe card made me suspicious even at that early stage."

"How come?"

"If you found it in the kitchen while making breakfast and were going to show it to me at the table, why not just stick it

in your apron pocket? Why go out of the kitchen to the dining room, put the card in your pocketbook, and return to the kitchen?"

"Anything else, Arthur?"

"Just this," Darriven said swinging around so he faced the processor screen. He nodded at the monitor. "May I erase Carleton?"

"Yes, he's already filed."

Darriven entered the erase code and watched the list vanish from the screen. He turned to Viveka.

"One thing about you, my dear, you're systematic. The way you're going about researching Elizabethan virginal music proves this. Other things, too. Before you go to the store, you make a list. I've noted that when you fill up your car you have a little notebook in which you put down the date of the fill up, the cost of the gasoline, the quantity, and the service station. So, I said, if Viveka is entering into a harmless but reasonably complex conspiracy with the Weckams and Brosnan, she'd have some record. Where would that record be? Where else but on one of your storage diskettes. So I selected the latest, your inventory disk. First I tried to load this file." Darriven set the processor for loading a file from the diskette in the drive. Then he typed "pergolesi" and tapped the re-

turn button. The phrase "file not found" spread across the top of the screen. Then he attempted to load "pulcinella" with the same result.

"You could have gone to the directory," Viveka pointed out, "and saved yourself a lot of trouble."

"I finally had to. And this is what I found." Darriven typed "diaghilev" across the top of the screen and pressed "return." About ten seconds later, a file filled the screen. "Clever," he said half to himself, "Diaghilev, who commissioned the *Pulcinella* ballet."

He looked at the screen, read it silently. It was a rundown of the scheme perpetrated by Viveka, the Weckams, and Brosnan. And, oh yes, he thought, Flinn.

"Is that how you found out?" Viveka asked.

He swung about so he was facing her. She didn't look at him, still gazed in the direction of the street window. "No," he said, "but it did validate my conclusions, filled in a few missing spots. Let me know to be ready for the Weckams' showing up at my front door."

"You did that so perfectly. So precisely."

"I admit to enjoying the look of amazement on Hector's face."

"I wondered how you could time that little event so accurately."

"A matter of mind over data, I suppose," Darriven said. "The ability to take disparate pieces of information and, bumping each against the others, derive a conclusion."

"I should have known." She paused, then went on. "Funny, Arthur, I just noticed. A person

sitting in this chair, facing that window—facing it at an angle, as I am facing it now or you were facing it earlier—in daylight or lamplight, that person could just make out anyone getting out of a vehicle stopped in front of the house."

"I won't say that didn't help."

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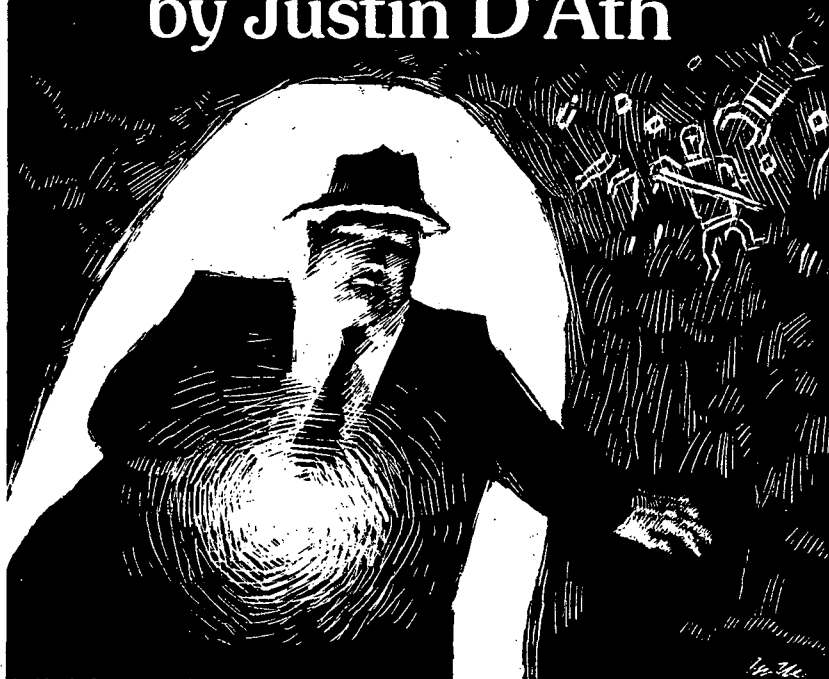
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FICTION

No Photographs

by Justin D'Ath



"What's this, superintendent? Holiday snaps?"

"Give those to me. . ."

I had never seen so much blood.

"It severed the femoral artery," explained Blaxland. "Whoever did this knew what he was doing."

But I wasn't so sure. After ten years on the police force of Australia's Northern Territories I thought I had a reasonable understanding of the ways of tribal Aborigines. Traditionally, a spear through the thigh was intended as punishment; it was not a death sentence. Rene Dondaine must have died within

minutes of the attack.

I turned to Jason Vitt, co-owner of Casuarina Art and Artifacts in the Todd Mall, Alice Springs. It was he who had discovered the body when he had arrived to open the shop at seven thirty that morning. His eyes were red-rimmed and he was as pale as the corpse that had been found sprawled on the floor behind us.

"The door was locked, you say?"

He nodded vaguely. "From the inside. See—it's a deadlock. You can't lock it from the outside unless you have a key."

I had already established that there were no other exits. "Could the attacker possibly have got hold of a key?" I asked.

He shrugged. "There are only two keys as far as I know—mine and . . ."

We had to stand aside as the body was carried out on a stretcher. Jason averted his eyes. When he spoke again, his voice was choked with tears. "You already found poor Rene's key in his pocket," he muttered.

I nodded thoughtfully and silently handed him a tissue.

It was an intriguing puzzle. A killer who could pass through locked doors like a wraith. And no apparent motive.

"You say nothing was taken?"

"No money or anything like that, sergeant. Of course—" he

seemed to hesitate—"there's that painting . . ."

"What, painting?" I asked. "You said nothing was missing."

"Well . . . not missing exactly," Jason stammered. The young man was still in a state of mild shock; he seemed to be having difficulty coming to terms with what had happened. "Come—I'll show you."

Avoiding the blood and the forensics photographer, who was still at work, he led me through to the rear of the shop where a small area had been partitioned off to form a makeshift studio. Much of the space was taken up by a large trestle table littered with paints and pots and brushes and the various other paraphernalia of the artist's trade. Completed and partially-finished canvases lined the walls. A garment of some kind—large and shapeless and paint-spattered—lay over a tall, three-legged stool set in front of an easel in the center of the floor. Jason indicated the painting on the easel.

"He was working on this yesterday. It's why he stayed back last night. He wanted to get it finished."

I gazed uncomprehendingly at the canvas. "But you said a painting was missing."

"Not *missing*, sergeant." The young man seemed exasper-

ated. "Look at it!" he urged.

Well, I've never been one for this modern art. Wide bands of black paint were slashed up and down and crosswise over a background of brown and white and yellow spots; it didn't look much different from a thousand other so-called works of art that sprouted like unsightly fungi on the walls of our national galleries.

"What about it?" I asked.

"It's *ruined!*" Jason Vitt wailed. "Can't you see?—those black streaks!"

"You mean they aren't meant to be there?"

"Of course not! Whoever killed poor Rene did this." Tears sprang to the young man's eyes and he turned away to hide them.

I spent half a minute studying the apparently vandalized piece of "art." When Jason seemed to have recovered, I asked:

"What exactly was this . . . um, painting meant to represent?"

"I think he was going to call it *The Lawgiver*. From a cave painting we found out past the Papunya Aboriginal settlement."

"You mean he was copying an Aboriginal cave painting?"

The young man assumed a pained expression. "Rene never copied anything. He *interpreted* things."

"But you said it was based on a cave painting," I insisted, "one that he found."

"Actually, I was the one who found it," Jason Vitt admitted. "We were out there a couple of months ago." He turned and began rummaging through the clutter on the trestle table. "There should be some photos here somewhere . . . Ah! Here they are."

Jason opened a white and yellow Kodak envelope and began riffling through a wad of photographs. He selected one and passed it to me. It showed an Aboriginal rock painting drawn in the style of the Tintupi desert tribes. Several stick men strutted and leapt in some sort of ceremonial dance. One of the figures caught my eye.

"Have you any more shots of this fellow?" I pointed.

"I think so." Once more Jason went through the photos. "Here's one," he said.

In this photograph the figure in question had been caught in closeup. Here, in the inimitable style of Aboriginal art, peculiar attention to anatomical detail left no doubt as to the gender of the subject. The male figure held a spear aloft and brandished a short, hooked killing-boomerang in his other hand. But it was his feet that interested me.

"Look at his shoes," I breathed.

But Jason had wandered away. He was standing next to the easel turning something over in his hands. At first glance I took it to be the tattered remains of a bird's nest.

"What have you got there?"

He looked up. "I'm not exactly sure . . . a bunch of old feathers. I just noticed it lying here under the stool."

In three paces I was at his side. Gently I lifted Jason's find out of his hands.

"My God," I muttered.

"What is it?" he asked.

I held the object up beside the photograph.

"A kadaitcha shoe."

Jason frowned. "What's kadaitcha?"

I didn't answer immediately. Something did not seem quite right. I sniffed.

There was a sign at the mouth of the cave:

SACRED SITE OF THE
TINTUPI PEOPLE

*Visitors are asked to respect
our Ancestors. No women
or children are to view
the rock paintings.*

*Please take no photographs.
Thank you.*

And it was signed by the council leader of a local Aboriginal group.

"Can't you read?" I asked.

"What do you mean?"

"It says no photographs."

Jason shrugged. "What harm could a couple of photos possibly do?"

What harm indeed? Now he was the sole owner of the thriving Casuarina Art and Artifacts in Alice Springs, and his future looked rosy with the forthcoming settlement of Rene Dondaine's considerable estate; Jason, as it turned out, was the sole beneficiary.

I had not been idle in the four days that had elapsed since Mr. Dondaine's body had been found. One discovery I had made was that he and Jason Vitt had lived together in Rene's plush duplex for nearly five years, and that just three weeks previously Jason had moved out and taken a room in the Oasis Motel just outside of town. I had also learned something very interesting from Blaxland.

"After you," I said, politely standing aside for Jason at the mouth of the cave.

"I'd really rather not go in, sergeant, if it's all the same with you."

"Why not? You went in last time."

"That was different. I didn't know about Kadaitcha then."

Ah yes, Kadaitcha: that much feared minister of tribal justice whose nocturnal prowlings have struck terror into the hearts of generations of Australia's tra-

ditional tenants. Kadaitcha the avenger. Kadaitcha whom no living man has seen. Kadaitcha of the night, who moves as silently as dingo, whose feathered shoes leave no tracks in the desert sand. It is rumored he walks on air, that the feathers bear him up like the wings of many birds, that he flies. It is rumored also that he can move through rocks and walls—even through locked doors without opening them.

Nowadays many men scoff and say that Kadaitcha no longer exists; but after sundown you see the truth in their eyes. . . .

Oh yes, Kadaitcha is alive and well. I've seen sufficient evidence of him to know that he still stalks the desert with his avenging spear, ready to strike down transgressors of tribal law.

A spear through the thigh. This is the calling card of Kadaitcha, without a doubt. Poor Rene Dondaine. You were marked for death even before that spear found you.

I entered the cave alone. Despite what I knew, my skin crawled. When something cold brushed against my forehead, my heart nearly stopped; I swung the torch upwards, expecting . . . But it was only a bat.

Ahead the cave opened out

into a large cavern. Here the walls were decorated with charcoal lines and whorls of ochre, in reds, yellows, and browns. The flashlight beam darted across a group of stick figures that seemed hauntingly familiar. It hesitated on the crude representation of the kadaitcha man. Then I lowered the light quickly and muttered a silent apology to the spirits of that place. Carefully I began searching the cave's wide floor for what I knew I would find.

Yes, there it was—over by the far wall. From a distance it resembled an old bird's nest. I shuffled over and picked it up. I brought it up close to my nostrils.

Eureka, I thought.

Jason was waiting anxiously at the mouth of the cave when I emerged.

"Did you see them?" he asked. "Did you see the paintings?"

I showed him the shoe of feathers. "Now we've got a pair," I said.

Then I placed my hand on his shoulder and told him his rights.

The police Toyota bashed and rattled over the corrugated dirt track that was not marked on any tourist map but would bring us back finally to Alice Springs.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"Camphor," I said.

When his eyebrows went up, I explained: "Both shoes smelled of mothballs. Where did you get them? A museum?"

He looked out at the spinefex-dotted red landscape. "Actually, they were Rene's. He had a collection of Aboriginal artifacts at home."

"I know. I've seen it." Poor Rene, I mused. The spear was his too, no doubt.

Aloud, I continued: "I've also had a look at that book he gave you, Jason. What's it called?—*Kadaitcha, Fact or Myth?*"

"You had no right to search my room without my knowledge," he said peevishly.

"I haven't been near your room. You left the book at Mr. Dondaine's. Very careless of you! As soon as I saw the inscription—*To Jason, the son I never had, Rene*—I knew I had you. You'd been pretending you knew nothing about Kadaitcha, yet you owned a book all about him.

"Incidentally," I added, "you should have paid more attention to that book, Mr. Vitt."

He nodded woodenly. "I know. I should have burned the bloody thing."

"I didn't mean that. I meant you should have read it more carefully. 'Kadaitcha, fact or myth?' The author concludes

—and quite rightly so—that he's a fact. You see, Kadaitcha is a real man, Jason; he's simply a tribal member deputized in secret by the elders to mete out punishment in certain grave or notable circumstances. He isn't a spirit; you should never have locked that door."

There was a long pause. I kept my eyes on the sandy track ahead. Finally Jason broke the silence.

"It seemed such a good idea," he said. "After all, they couldn't very well convict a ghost."

Jason sighed. "You see, I didn't want anyone else to get the blame."

"I know," I said gently. "It's a shame you didn't get away with it."

He looked at me strangely. "You mean you know about Rene?"

"We did an autopsy. Cancer. He had a month at the most."

"He was in so much pain!" Jason groaned. "And he wouldn't take anything for it. 'The body is a temple,' he'd say. He never even took an aspirin. Poor, poor Rene!" The young man put his face in his hands.

"In the end I had to move out," he sobbed. "I couldn't stand seeing him suffer."

Two kangaroos bounded out onto the road and frisked zig-zagging along in front of us. I hit the horn and they swerved

away into the desert on our right.

"So you killed him."

"It was the only thing to do," whispered Jason Vitt.

He was sentenced to five years' jail with a non-parole period of eighteen months. Some weeks afterwards I learned that the judge had lost his wife to leukemia less than six months before the trial.

I'd been the principal witness for the prosecution. But my testimony was hardly needed. Jason stood up before the court and made a full confession. Nor did I feel any guilt in withholding a small item of evidence. . . .

Nobody but Jason and I knew of the existence of the photographs. There seemed to be no need to bring them out in court. In light of the sacred nature of their contents, and in deference to the sign written outside the cave, I slipped them into a bottom drawer and promptly forgot all about them.

It is only now, two and a half years later, while cleaning out my desk for my successor, that

I have come across them.

"What's this, superintendent?" says young Constable Janice Pale, who's assisting me. "Holiday snaps?"

"Give those to me!"

But before I can stop her, the girl has opened the envelope and pulled out the sheaf of photos depicting the forbidden cave paintings.

"Hey, I didn't know you were into modern art, super," Janice exclaims.

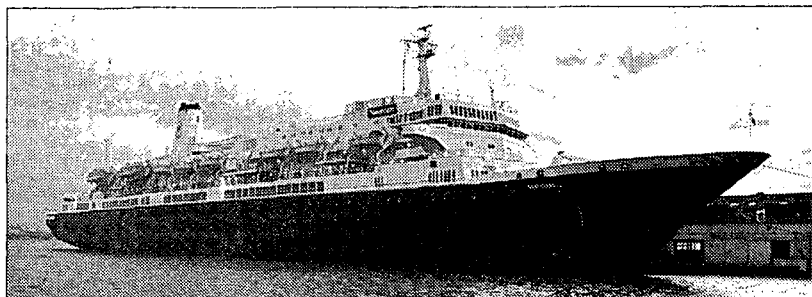
"Here!" None too gently I snatch the photographs out of her hands. How did that sign go: "No women and children are to view the rock paintings. Please take no photographs."

"Would you leave me alone for a few moments please, constable."

I wait until she has shut the door behind her. Then, with a peculiar sense of déjà vu, I shuffle slowly through the wad of color prints.

"Well, Mr. Vitt," I mutter aloud, "perhaps you weren't so far off the mark after all."

The details of every single photograph are obliterated behind a savage cross-hatching of broad, black brushstrokes.



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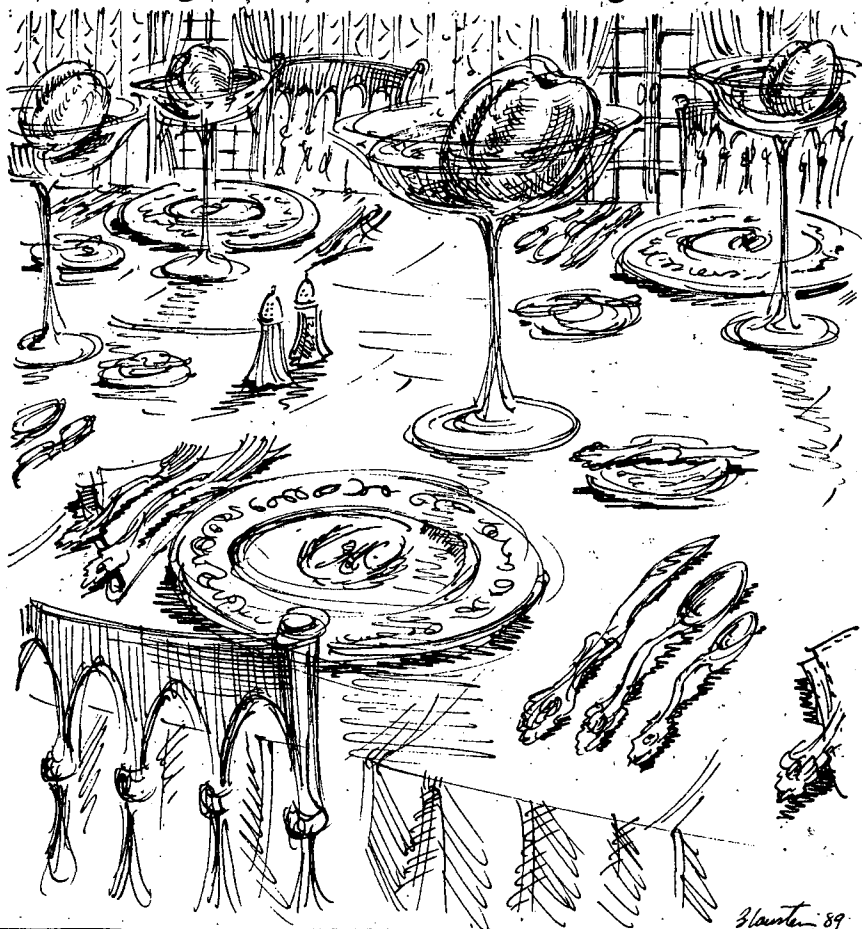


Illustration by Hank Blaustein

134

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The big liner was running like a ghost, with all lights out on deck and every porthole shrouded. This might seem to the layman almost humorously inconsistent; for, every minute or two the blast of her foghorn went bellowing away into the night, loudly enough to disturb the slumbers of any U-boat lying "doggo" within five miles.

Duncan Drew and I were alone in the smoking room when the steward brought us our coffee. There were very few passengers; and the first cabin folk were curiously different from those of peace time. Most of them, I fancied, were crossing the Atlantic on some business directly connected with the war. There was a Belgian professor from Louvain, for instance, who was taking his family over to the new post that had been found for him at an American university; and there was the wife of an Italian statesman, an American woman, who was returning home to raise funds for the Red Cross of her adopted country. There were others whom it was not so easy to place; and Duncan Drew would have been among them, I think, if I had not known him. Nobody could have looked more like a civilian and less like an officer of the British navy than Duncan did at this moment. But I knew the job on which he was engaged. When he found that I knew the Maine coast, he asked me to help him in a certain matter.

It was in the days before America entered the war; and his mission was to present certain evidence of a widespread German conspiracy to the United States government. If they approved, he was to cooperate in unearthing the ringleaders. The conspiracy was a very simple one. It seemed likely, at the time, that the U-boats would soon be unable to operate from European bases; and the German admiralty, always looking a few months ahead, though perhaps ignoring remoter possibilities, was calmly planning, with the help of its agents in America, to work from the other side of the water. The thousand mile coastline of the United States had many advantages from the German point of view, especially in its lonelier regions where there are hundreds of small islands, either uninhabited or privately owned, and not necessarily owned by American citizens. The U-boats, it is true, would have to travel further if they were to work in European waters. But already they had been forced by the British patrols to travel more than fifteen hundred miles from their European bases, far to the north of Scotland and west of Ireland, before they could operate against the Atlantic shipping. The slight increase in the distance would be

more than repaid by the comparative safety of the submarines. They planned, in short, to work from American bases, while a dull-witted British navy should be vainly endeavoring to close European doors, which the enemy was no longer using.

We didn't talk "shop" in the smoking room, even when we were alone, for the ground had been covered so often. On this particular evening, I remember, we talked chiefly about food. The dinner had been excellent; and it had been a curious sensation to pass from the slight but obvious restrictions of London to a ship which seemed to possess all the resources of the United States.

"I've only been in Berlin once," said Duncan, "but I was there long enough to know that they will feel the pinch first, and feel it worst. They are rum beggars, the Boches. Think of the higher command marking out the early stages of the war by the dinners it was going to have—every menu carefully planned, one for Brussels, one for Paris, and probably one for London! I remember lunching at a hotel when I was in Berlin, and seeing rather a curious thing. There was a table in the center of the room, laid for what was evidently going to be a very grand affair. It was laid for about twenty people, and I saw a thing I had never seen before. Every champagne glass contained a peach. I asked my waiter what it meant, and he said that Von Schramm, the fellow who is one of the moving spirits behind this new submarine campaign, was entertaining some of his pals that day; and this was one of his pretty little fads. He thought it improved the wine, and also that it prevented gout, or some rot of that sort."

"How very German! My chief objection would be that there wouldn't be much room left for the champagne."

"Trust the German for that, my lad. The glasses were extra large, and of a somewhat unusual pattern. As a matter of fact, the decorative effect was rather pretty. It's queer—the way some things stick in your memory and others vanish. I believe that my most vivid impression of the few months I passed in Germany is that blessed table, waiting for its guests, with the peaches in the champagne glasses. I didn't see the guests arrive. Wish I had now. There's always something a little stagey, don't you think, about a table waiting for its guests; but this was more so. It affected me like the throne of melodrama waiting for its emperor. Funny that it should have made such an impression, isn't it?"

I thought not; for it was part of Duncan's business to be impressed by unusual things—more especially when they were symptomatic

of something else. It was this that made him so useful, for instance, in that exciting little episode of the cargo of onions which was intercepted—owing to one of his impressions—in a Scandinavian ship. They were perfectly good onions, the first few layers of them; and they looked like perfectly good onions when you burrowed into the lower layers. But Duncan had been seized by an absurd desire to see whether they would bounce or not; and when he experimented on the deck, they did bounce, bounce like cricket balls, as high as the ship's funnels.

This capture of one of the largest cargoes of contraband rubber was due to an impression he got from two innocent cablegrams which had been intercepted and brought to him at the Admiralty—one of them apparently concerning an operation for appendicitis, and the other announcing the death of the patient. His intuitions, indeed, resembled those of the artist; and, though he was one of the smartest sailors in the navy, he looked more like a pre-Raphaelite painter's conception of Galahad than anyone I had ever seen in the flesh. He looked exceedingly youthful, and the dead whiteness of his face, which his Philistine brethren described as lantern-jawed, was lighted by the alert eyes of the new age. They had that peculiar glitter which one sees in the eyes of aviators, and sometimes in those of the businessmen accustomed to the electric cities of the new world. His hands were like those of a musician, long and quick and nervous. But I could easily imagine them throttling an enemy.

We turned in early that night, and I dozed fitfully, revolving fragments of our somewhat disconnected conversation. The beautiful sea-cry "All's well" came to me from the watch in the bow, as the bell tolled the passage of the hours; and it was not till daybreak that I slept, only to dream of that table in Berlin, waiting for its guests, with a peach in every champagne glass.

II

As we waited in the cold brilliance of New York harbor, a few mornings later, and looked with considerable satisfaction at the German steamers that were huddled like gigantic red and black cattle in the docks of the Hamburg-Amerika and North German-Lloyd, a telegram was brought aboard which settled our plans.

Duncan was to go down to Washington that night, while I was to go up to Rockport, a little fishing village on the coast of Maine.

At this place I was to take a motor car and drive some fifteen miles to a certain lonely strip of pine clad coast. There we were to camp out in a tiny cottage, which we could rent from an old sea captain whom I knew before the war. Two artists, in quest of a quiet place for work, could hardly find a happier hunting ground. I was particularly glad to find that we could go exploring among the islands that dotted the blue sea for scores of miles. It was a beautiful coast, and their dark peaks of pine were printed like tiny black feathers against a sky of unimagined sapphire. Nothing could seem more remote from the devilries of modern war.

Duncan joined me, a week later, in Captain Humphrey's cottage—it was a small white-painted wooden house among the pine trees on the mainland, built on the rocks which overhung a deep blue inlet of the Atlantic. We discussed our plans on the little verandah, from which we could see half a dozen of those pine-crowned islands which were the objects of suspicion. There were scores of others we could not see to north and south of us, and we checked them off on the map as we sat there under the dried sunfish and the other queer marine trophies which the old skipper had brought back with him from the South Seas.

The nights were quite cold enough for a fire, though it was only mid-July; and we finished all our plans that evening round the big stove, the kind of thing you see in the foc'sle of a steam trawler, which stood in the center of Captain Humphrey's parlor. We were more than a little glad indeed to let our pipes and the good-smelling pine logs waft their incense abroad; for—like all the dwellers in those parts—the old skipper subsisted through the winter on the codfish which he had salted and stored during the summer in his attic; and though his abode was clean and neat as himself, it had the healthy reek of a trawler, as well as its heating apparatus. A large oil lamp, which hung from the ceiling, was none the worse, moreover, for the moderating influence of a little wood smoke.

"Tomorrow, then," said Duncan, "we take the motor launch and have a look at all the islands between this place and Rockport. They've been awfully decent down in Washington about it. The only trouble is that they don't and can't believe it. Exactly the state of mind we were in, before the war. Everybody laughing at exactly the same things, from spy stories to signals on the coast. I met a man in the government who had been taken to a window at midnight to see a light doing the Morse code, off this very coast, and he laughed at it. Didn't believe it. Thought it was the evening

star. We were like that ourselves. No decent man can believe certain things, till they are beyond question.

"It's our own fault. We told them all was well before the war; and I don't see how we can blame them for thinking their own intervention unnecessary now. We keep on telling America that it's all over except the shouting. We paint the rosiest kind of picture today about the prospects of the Allies; and then we grumble amongst ourselves because Americans don't turn the whole of their continent upside down to come and help us. We deliberately lulled America to sleep, and then we kicked because we heard that she had only one eye open.

"Well—they've given us a blessing on our wild goose chase. We may do all the investigating we like, as I understand the position, so long as we leave any resultant action to the United States. This means, I suppose—in old Captain Humphrey's language—that we may be 'rubber necks,' but we mustn't shoot. All the same, I brought the guns with me." He laid two automatic pistols on the table. "It's more than likely, from what I've been able to gather, that we may have to defend our own skins; and I suppose that's permissible. Oh, damn that mosquito!" He slapped his ankle, and complained bitterly that the old sea captain's faith in his own tough exterior had prevented him from providing his doors and windows with mosquito netting.

It was on the fourth morning of our search that things began to happen. For my own part, I had already begun to be so absorbed in the peace of the world about us that the whole business of the war seemed unreal and our own quest futile. I could no longer wonder at those inhabitants of the new world who were said to look upon our European Armageddon as a bad dream, or a morbid tale in a book which it was better not to open. As we chug-chugged along the coast, close under the thick pine woods, which grew almost to the edge of the foam, I thought I had never breathed an air so fragrant, or seen color so brilliant in earth and sky and sea. Once or twice, as we shut off the motor and lay idle, we heard a hermit thrush in the woods, breaking the silence with a peculiarly plaintive liquid call, quite unlike the song of our thrushes at home but very beautiful. Here and there we passed the little red, blue, and green buoys of lobster pots, shining like jewels as the clear water lapped about them in that amazing sunlight.

We were making for a certain island about which we had ob-

tained some interesting details from Captain Humphrey himself. He told us that it had been purchased two or three years ago by a New Yorker who was building himself quite a fine place on it. He seemed to be a somewhat mysterious character, for he was never seen on the mainland and all his supplies were brought up to him on his own large private yacht.

"There's a wharf on the island," said Captain Humphrey, "with deep water running up to it, so that a yacht can sail right up to his porch, as you might say, and you wouldn't know it was there. The cove runs in on the slant, and the pines grow between it and the sea. You wouldn't notice it unless you ran right in at the mouth. It makes a fine private harbor for a yacht, and I believe it has held two at a time. There's a good beach for clams on the west shore, but of course, it's private."

We certainly saw no sign of yacht or harbor as we approached the island from the landward side; but we made no departure from our course to look for either. We were bound for the clam beach, where we intended to do a little clam poaching.

"It doesn't look promising," said Duncan as we approached the shore. "There doesn't seem to be anybody to warn trespassers off. But perhaps the clam beach is not regarded as dangerous, and the trespassing begins further on."

In a few moments we had moored the launch in four feet of water, and were ashore with a couple of clam rakes. We had dug a hundred as we walked towards the pine wood when Duncan straightened up and said:

"This makes my back ache, and it's blazing hot. I'm going to have a pipe in the shade, up there."

I shouldered my rake and followed him into the wood. As soon as we were well among the trees, we began to walk quickly up the thin winding path, which we supposed would lead us to the neighborhood of the house.

"Not at all promising," said Duncan. "They would never let us ramble about like this if they had anything to conceal. Just for the fun of it, we'll go up to the house, and ask if Mr. Chutney Bilge, the novelist, doesn't live there. You want his autograph, don't you?"

In five minutes we had emerged from the pines, and saw before us a very pleasant looking wooden house with a wide verandah, screened all round with mosquito netting, and backed by glimpses of blue sea between dark pine trunks. There was not a soul to be seen, and no sign of its occupants anywhere. We walked up to the

porch, pulled open the netted door in the outer screen, and knocked on the door of the house, which stood wide open. We waited and listened; but there was no sound except the ticking of a clock. There was another open door on the right side of the hall. Duncan felt a sudden impulse to look through it, and tiptoed quietly forward. He had no sooner looked than he stood as if turned to stone, with so queer an expression on his face that I instantly came to his side to see what Medusa had caused it. It seemed a very harmless Medusa; but I doubt if anything could have startled me more at the moment. We stood there, staring at a table, laid for lunch. There were twelve champagne glasses, of a somewhat unusual pattern; and each of these glasses contained a peach.

III

Before I could be quite sure whether I was dreaming or waking, Duncan had dashed into the room on the other side of the hall, and grabbed up a bundle of papers that had been dropped as if by someone in a great hurry, all over the table. He glanced at one or two.

"But this—this—settles it," he cried. "Come out of it quickly." And, in a few seconds, we were in the cover of the woods again.

"Schramm himself is over here, apparently. He must have come by U-boat," Duncan muttered as we hurried down the path towards our launch. "If they catch us, we're simply dead and buried, and past praying for."

"But what does it mean? Where are they? Why the devil have they left everything open to the first-comer?"

"Beats me completely. But we'd better not wait to inquire. The next move is up to Washington."

"Look here, Duncan, we'd better be careful about our exit from the woods. If anyone happens to have spotted the launch, we may run our heads into a trap."

I had an uneasy feeling that we were being watched, and that every movement we made was plainly seen by a gigantic but invisible spectator, very much the kind of feeling, I suppose, that insects must have under the microscope. I felt sure that we were not going to have it all our own way with this quiet island. Duncan hesitated for a moment, but I was insistent that we should take a look at our landing place before we left our cover. It was a characteristic of Duncan that as soon as he had discovered what he wanted, he became as forthright a sailor as you could wish to find;

and I knew that if we were to escape with whole skins, or even to make use of our discovery, I should have to exercise my own wits. Fortunately, my own "impressions" began when his finished; for, after he had yielded to my persuasion, we made a slight circuit through the woods, and crept out through the long grass on the top of the little cliff overlooking the beach where we had landed. Our clams were still there, in two neat little dumps. So was the launch, but in the stern of it there sat a tall red-bearded man, who looked like a professor, and a couple of sailors. They were all three talking German in low, excited tones, and they were all three armed with rifles.

The launch lay almost directly below us, and we could hear some of their conversation. I gathered that the luncheon party had gone on board a U-boat which had just arrived, to inspect the latest improvements. Something had gone wrong. They had submerged; and it seemed to be doubtful whether they could get her up again. That, of course, was why the house was deserted and our trespassing unforbidden. It was probably also the reason why the sentries had been absent, and had only just discovered our launch on their rounds. One of the sailors was aggrieved, it seemed to me, that no effort was being made to obtain other help for the submerged men than the island itself could lend. His best friend was aboard; and he thought it wicked not to give them a chance, even if it meant their internment. The red-bearded professor was explaining to him, however, in the most highly approved style of modern Germany, that his feelings were by no means logical; and that it was far nobler to sacrifice one's friends than to endanger the State.

"But, if the State is a kind of devil," said the sailor, who was a bit of a logician himself, "I prefer my friends, who in the meantime are being suffocated."

"That is a fallacy," the professor was answering. Then, from the direction of the house, there came a confused sound of shouting.

A fourth sailor came tearing down the beach like a maniac.

"Where are the clam fishers?" he called to the three philosophers. "They are to be taken, dead or alive."

At the same moment, I saw the glint of the sun on the revolvers of several other men, who were advancing through the woods towards the beach, peering to right and left of them. Without a whisper between us, Duncan and I crawled off along the cliff, through the thick undergrowth.

Obviously, the submarine had come to the surface again, and the whole merry crowd was on our track. The island was not more than a quarter of a mile in diameter; and I saw no hope of evading our pursuers, of whom there must be at least twenty, judging from the cries that reached us. There was nothing for it but to choose the best place for putting up a fight; and, as luck would have it, we were already on the best line of defense. The undergrowth between the cliff's edge and the woods was so thick that nobody could discover us, except by crawling up the trail by which we had ourselves entered. It proved to be the only way by which the cliff's edge could be explored, and we had a full half-mile of the island's circumference, a long ledge, only a few feet wide, on which we could crawl in security for the time being, till the hunt came up behind us. I remember noticing—even in those moments of peril—that the ground and the bushes were littered with big crab claws and clam shells that had been dropped and picked there by the sea gulls and crows; and I was thinking—in some queer way—of the easy life that these birds lead when I almost put my hand on a human skull, protruding from a litter of loose earth, white flakes of shell, and crabs' backs. Duncan pulled a heap of the evil-smelling stuff away with his clam rake, and bared the right side of the skeleton. There was a half-rotten clam rake in the bony clutch of the dead man. Evidently somebody else had paid the penalty before us. The body had been buried, and rain, snow, or the insatiable sea gulls had uncovered the yellow-toothed head.

A few yards further on, the cliff projected so far out that even when one hung right over the edge, it was only just possible to see where it met the swirling water, which seemed very deep here. About fifteen yards out, there was a big boulder of rock, covered with brown seaweed.

"Look here, Duncan," I said, "there's only one real chance for us. We've got to swim to the mainland, but we can't do it by daylight. We've got to pass six hours till it's dark enough, and there's only one way to do it. How far can you swim under water?"

"About fifty feet," he said. "You're going crazy, old man, it's a mile and a half to the mainland."

"Duncan, you're a devil of a man for getting into a scrape. But when it comes to getting out of one, I feel a little safer in my own hands. Can you get as far as that rock under water?"

"I think so," he said, and caught on to the suggestion at once.

The cries were coming along the cliff's edge now, and it was a

question of only half a minute before some of our pursuers would be on the top of us.

"Hurry, then. Swim to the north of the rock, and don't come up till you're on the other side. If you feel yourself rising, grab hold of the sea weed, and keep yourself down till you've hauled round the rock. Quick!"

There was a crashing in the bushes, not fifty yards away, along the cliff, as we dived into the clear green water. The plunge carried one further than I expected, and four or five strokes along the bottom of the sea brought me to the base of the rock. It was quite easy to turn it, and I was relieved to find that there was a good ledge for landing on the further side, only an inch or two above the level of the water, and quite screened from the island by the rock itself, which was about ten feet in length and curved in a half-moon shape, with the horns pointing towards the mainland. In fact, it was like a large Chesterfield couch of stone, covered with brown sea weed, and resolutely turning its back on the island. We were luckier than I had dared to hope; and when, in a few seconds, Duncan had coiled himself on the ledge beside me, I saw by his grin that he thought we had solved the problem of escape. For five minutes we lay dead still, listening to the clamor along the cliff from which we had just dived.

"Thank the Lord, we get the sun here," said Duncan at last, as the sounds died away. "There's only one thing that worries me now. What are we to do when they come round in a boat?"

"They won't think of that for some time," I said, "but when they do, we must take to the water again, and work round behind the rock. We ought to be able to keep it between us and the blighters, with any luck. We've only got to keep enough above water to breathe with; and I've seen some fine camouflage done with a little seaweed before now."

We looked at the yard-long fringes of brown seaweed, and decided that it would be possible to defy anything but the closest inspection of our rock by the simple process of sliding down into the water and pulling the seaweed over our heads, on the side next to the island. There was a reef which would prevent a boat passing on that side.

Our clothes were almost dried by the blazing sun before we were disturbed again. Duncan was ruefully contemplating a corn cob pipe, which he affirmed had been ruined by the salt water. He poked the stem at a huge sea anemone, which immediately sucked

it in, and held it as firmly as a smoker's mouth, with so ludicrous an effect that Duncan's risible faculties were dangerously moved. I was half afraid of one of his volcanic guffaws when we both heard a sound that struck us dumb—the sound of oars coming steadily in our direction. We slipped into the water, according to plan, hauled ourselves round behind the rock, and drew the long thick fringes of seaweed over our heads. We held ourselves anchored there by the brown stems, and kept little more than our noses above the water. No concealment could have been more complete. The boat passed on; and in five minutes we were back again on our ledge, and drying in the sun.

"Good Lord," said Duncan, suddenly, "that was a near shave. I'd forgotten that beastly thing."

He pointed to the sea anemone, which was still sucking at the yellow corn cob pipe. It looked like the bristling red mouth of some drunken and half-submerged sea god, and could hardly have been missed by the boat's crew, if they had been looking for anything like it.

"Lord, what a shave!" he said again. "What would Schramm have said if he had seen it!"

Then, as we stared at the absurd marine creature, we rocked in silent spasms of mirth—human beings are made of a very queer clay—picturing the bewildered faces of the Boches at a sight which would have meant our death.

The sense of humor was benumbed in both of us before long. The sun was dropping low, and we did not dry as quickly as before. There was a stillness on the island, which boded no good, I thought, though our pursuers evidently believed that we had escaped them.

"They probably think we swam ashore earlier in the game," said Duncan. "They must be sick at not having spotted us."

"I wonder what they are up to now?"

"Probably destroying evidence and getting ready to clear out, if they really have a notion that their big men over here may be involved. Unfortunately, these papers don't give anything away so far as I can see except that they're addressed to Schramm; but it's quite obvious what they were doing."

We lay still and waited, listening to the strangely peaceful lapping of the water round our rock, and watching the big sea perch and rock cod that moved like shadows below.

"I wonder if that fellow suspects mischief," said Duncan, pointing over the cliff. "By Jove! isn't he splendid?"

Over the highest point of the island a white-headed eagle was mounting, in great, slow, sweeping circles, without one beat of the long, dark wings that must have measured seven feet from tip to tip.

"It's too splendid to be the German eagle. Praise the Lord, it's the native species; and he's taking his time because he has to take wide views. He has to soar high enough to get his bearings."

Up and up, the glorious creature circled, till he dwindled in the dazzling blue to the size of a sea gull; and still he wheeled and mounted, till he became a black dot no bigger than an English sky lark. Then he moved, like a bullet, due east.

"I almost believe in omens," said Duncan. "Ah, look out! There they come!"

The masts of a large yacht, which must have emerged from the private harbor of which Captain Humphrey spoke, came slowly round the island. We had only just time to slip into the water, behind our rock, before she came into full view. She passed so near to us that the low sun cast the traveling shadows of her railing almost within reach of my hand; and the shadows of her two boats on the port side came along the clear green water between us and the island, like the gray ghosts of some old pirate's dinghies.

She must have been still in sight, and we were still in our hiding place, when it seemed as if the island tried to leap towards the sky, and we were deafened by a terrific concussion. Fragments of wood, and great pieces of stone, dropped all round us in the poppling water, and more than one deadly missile struck the rock itself.

"They've blown up the whole show!" cried Duncan. "There can't be anybody left alive on the island!"

We waited—ten minutes or more—to see if other explosions were to follow. Then we swam for the clam beach to investigate. It was littered with fragments of the buildings that had been destroyed. The tarred roof of a shed had been dropped there almost intact, as if from the claws of some gigantic eagle. The pine wood looked as if it had been subjected to a barrage fire; and, in many places, the undergrowth was burning furiously.

We dashed up the path, with the smoke stinging our eyes, towards the dull red glow, which was already beginning to rival the deepening crimson of the Maine sunset. The central portion of the house was still standing, though much of it had been blown bodily away, and the fire was laying fierce hands upon it from all sides. We turned to the north, where we supposed the wharf had been.

The remains of half a dozen sheds were burning on one side of the cove, and it looked as if half the cliff had been tumbled into it on the other.

The heat of the fire along the wharf was so fierce that we turned back to the house again.

"Well," said Duncan, "there's evidence enough to give a few good headlines to the neutral press— '*Gasoline Explosion on Maine Coast! Wealthy New Yorker Escapes Death in Fiery Furnace!*' Fortunately, there's also enough for Washington to lay up in its memory."

Another section of the house fell as we looked at it; and we saw the interior of the dining room, with the flames licking up the three remaining walls. By one of those curious freaks of high explosive, the table was hardly disarranged; and our last glimpse of it, through a fringe of fire, showed us those twelve queer champagne glasses. They stood there, flickering like evil goblins, a peach in every glass . . .

We watched them for five minutes. Then the whole scintillating fabric collapsed; and we sat down to wait for the frantic motorboat, which was already thumping towards us, with the reporter of the Rockport *Sentinel* furiously writing in her bows.

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Carol Harper

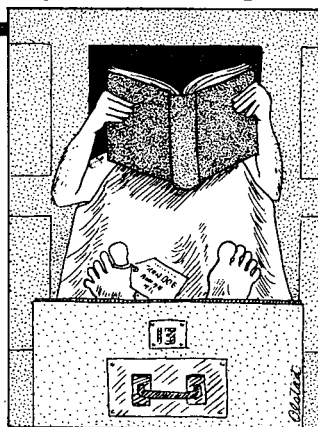


Illustration by Patricia Olstad

Stanislaus Rolk is a New York homicide detective who “studies” murder. He owns every book written about the subject, he attends lectures that might pertain to it, and he solves cases with alarming success. Small wonder that he attends a lecture at the Metropolitan Museum about Toltec ritual sacrifices. And this lecture prepares him to take over the investigation of a murder that occurred near the museum—one apparently performed with a Toltec artifact and in the ritual style described by Kate Silverman, an anthropologist he had met at the lecture. His partner, Paul Devlin, respects his skill but worries about him, since Rolk is always hunting for his daughter, missing for some fifteen years. Devlin is not sure that Rolk is up to all this stress. William Heffernan, in *Ritual* (NAL, \$18.95, 310 pp) mixes police procedure with archaeology, Toltec superstition, illegal aliens, the Sanctuary Movement, and serial killings in a tightly written and suspenseful novel.

Aaron Elkins also deals with Mayan/Toltec anthropology in his latest Gideon Oliver, *Curses* (Mysterious Press, \$15.95, 204 pp), with Oliver on site in the Yucatan at a dig he had previously investigated. This dig is “tainted” by the fact that the former director is thought to have sabotaged it and absconded with a valuable codex. But the Mexican government has allowed it to be reopened, and Oliver comes down in response to a request from the

new director, his mentor Abraham Irving Goldstein, to investigate a skeleton found in the ruins. Then a curse is found and people start dying in the manner specified in the curse. Oliver, as the "skeleton detective," solves not only the mystery of the curse but also the long-term disappearance of the former director and the codex in this witty and well-plotted mystery. A very vivid setting along with excellent characterization makes this, to my mind, the best Gideon Oliver to date.

Also writing about archaeologists and anthropologists, Dicey Thomas takes us behind the scenes of a North American dig where the director seems especially enamored of the possibility of extra-terrestrial intervention. In **Statutory Murder** (Tudor Publishers, Inc. \$14.95, 192 pp), we meet Dr. Bertha Bediam Barstow, a metallurgist who analyzes and dates metallic artifacts. She is asked by Aaron Hodgkins, the director of the dig, to analyze a grotesque statuette he has found in Massachusetts. But within hours of their initial meeting, Hodgkins is found in the Widner Library elevator, brutally murdered. The police don't take kindly to Bertha, nor she to them, and she takes up the investigation on her own, drawing upon her various contacts in the academic and consulting world. Perhaps the involvement of various members of the cast is a little too coincidental, but the reckless abandon with which Bertha attacks the investigation is charming, and a return engagement must be in the wings.

Harry Stoner is back—in **Fire Lake** (Dell, \$3.50, 256 pp) and **Extenuating Circumstances** (Delacorte Press, \$15.95, 234 pp). In *Fire Lake* someone has signed into a sleazy motel using Harry's name—and then tried to commit suicide. Or at least that is what the motel manager tells Harry in an early morning phone call. When Harry investigates, he discovers that the unknown impersonator is his old college roommate, "Lonnie Jack" Jackowski. Stoner had drifted away from him when Lonnie Jack got into drugs, and it looks as if he hasn't quit drifting. But it is a strange suicide attempt—Lonnie Jack appears to have been beaten *after* the overdose. In *Extenuating Circumstances*, Harry travels across the river to Covington, Kentucky, to find a missing man, one dearly loved by his family, his business partner, and the community at large. He is the primary moving force, and monetary support, for a drug clinic for the homeless and street people of the area, and he has given no indication that there's anything wrong which would cause him to run away. When his car is found abandoned and bloody, murder is suggested, and investigation by the police

brings out a secret in the missing man's past that threatens to destroy the lives of his loved ones as well. Jonathan Valin is still developing the character of this fascinating, hardboiled private eye from Cincinnati. In both mysteries, Stoner shows a hardened side that began developing in the earlier *Life's Work*, an adherence to an increasingly internalized code of honor which Harry enforces regardless of the law or society.

Angus Straun is a policeman. He also writes historical novels (the twelfth century is his field of expertise) and plays a fine game of golf. The deadline is fast approaching for his revised second novel and the Royal West Wessex is about to host a major golf tournament when Angus is asked to investigate a case of vandalism on the course. When the greensman is found dead in a bunker, the investigation escalates, and since Angus is already on the scene, his superior allows him to continue the investigation. An interesting combination of police procedural, biblio-mystery, historical information (crossbows and longbows figure in the crime) and sport make up Barry Cork's first novel, **Dead Ball** (Scribners, \$16.95, 220 pp).

Mary Jo Adamson (formerly writing as M. J. Adamson) has returned with **April When They Woo** (Bantam, \$3.50, 195 pp) and **May's Newfangled Mirth** (Bantam, \$3.50, 210 pp). And with her returns New York police lieutenant Balthazar Marten. But Marten is no longer a part of the NYPD—he has resigned, forfeiting his pension to take a position with the San Juan, Puerto Rico, police department where he has been assigned since *Not Till a Hot January*. He likes the location, his partner (Sixto Cardenas), and the people (especially Maira, university professor and wife of a Vietnam MIA whom he met in *Not Till a Hot January*). And even though some of the members of the SJPd may not want him there (Angel Negron, for one) Marten takes the plunge. He returns to New York while his partner recuperates from wounds sustained in *Remember March*, ties up all the loose ends, and returns in time to help Cardenas investigate the disappearance of two jewelry salesmen, the appearance of two dead John Does, and a series of robberies in Old San Juan in *April When They Woo*. In *May's Newfangled Mirth*, a poet, whose death in a motorcycle accident occurred in *Remember March* and was investigated by Negron in *April When They Woo*, is the subject of a follow-up investigation by Marten. As usual in the Marten series, the setting and the characterization are superb, the procedure interesting, and the mystery well-plotted.



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Gene Hackman in *The Package*

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



On the eve of signing a historic nuclear disarmament treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union, there arises an insidious plot by a shady alliance of American and Russian military men to derail the peace effort (which these men see as a threat to their power)....

A twenty-five-year army veteran, Sergeant Johnny Gallagher, is ordered to escort a prisoner, another veteran American soldier who's slugged one too many officers, from Germany back to the States, but loses his charge at Dulles Airport....

A young American soldier is nabbed from a woman's East Berlin apartment. After a brief imprisonment, he's given orders to infiltrate a neo-Nazi group in Chicago....

Tie these elements together, shake them around a bit, and

you've got **The Package**, a political conspiracy thriller.

It begins ominously enough, in the divided city of Berlin, where a heavy military presence is part of everyday life, where the intrigue of the Cold War still hangs in the air.

Sergeant Gallagher, played by Gene Hackman, is a good army man who finds himself mixed up in a plot that takes him from Berlin to Washington, D.C., to Chicago. Along the way he is pursued by a mysterious gang of thugs who each time appear in a different guise—sometimes as sailors, sometimes as soldiers, sometimes as local police or M.P.'s.

In turn, he is also trying to track down his lost "package," Walter Henke (Tommy Lee Jones), the prisoner he had been escorting.

A fistful of phony I.D. cards, most with Chicago addresses,

taken from one of the thugs, convinces Gallagher he must go to the Windy City to get to the bottom of the mystery. The American president and the Soviet Communist Party secretary general are scheduled to meet in Chicago where they will lay a wreath at the University of Chicago, the site where the atom was first smashed.

Since he lost his prisoner and because he suspects some sort of chicanery at work, Gallagher cannot turn to the authorities for help. Besides, he can't even be sure who the authentic authorities are. Instead he turns to his ex-wife, a lieutenant colonel who works in military personnel. (Eileen Gallagher is played by Joanna Cassidy.) Colonel Gallagher's access to military records allows her to pull files on her husband's escaped prisoner. The records cast further doubt about the prisoner's true identity. Will the real Walter Henke please stand up. But things aren't that simple for the Gallaghers.

In Chicago they hook up with an old Vietnam buddy of Sergeant Gallagher's, Milan Delich (Dennis Franz). He's now a policeman, and he's willing to risk his life to help. After all, world peace seems to be at stake here.

The political message of *The Package* may be a bit heavy-handed for some. Not everyone agrees with the nuclear disarmament movement. And some may find the covert activities of a renegade band of military careerists unbelievable, although one might keep Oliver North in mind. But if such suspense fans can put aside their political doctrines for the length of the film, they'll find an enjoyable experience.

Finally, what thriller worth its salt wouldn't want to attempt at least one bow to Hitchcock, the master? As Hitchcock made cameo appearances in his films, he makes one in *The Package*. Watch the store windows in Chicago and keep Presidents Nixon and Reagan in mind.

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The July Mysterious Photo-Jan Streilein of Johnstown, mentions go to Colleen F. Robert G. Stewart of Oak-Leonard of Gander, New-Hall of Chillicothe, Ohio; Georgia; Lane Olinghouse of Virginia Thompson of Ala-



graph contest was won by Pennsylvania. Honorable Glenn of Corvallis, Oregon; land, California; Christopher foundland, Canada; D. B. John Wilson of Augusta, Everett, Washington; and meda, California.

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ALLEY. OOPS! by Jan Streilein

Why are you giving me a ticket, officer? That alley isn't marked ONE WAY, I didn't run a stop sign, and I certainly wasn't speeding. The passage is narrow, but I didn't hit anything. What's the problem?

That place is off limits. Didn't you see the PROTECTED AREA—ENDANGERED SPECIES sign?

That was in somebody's handwriting. I thought it was a joke referring to the derelicts who frequent that rundown hotel.

No joke, ma'am. About three months ago they were renovating the second floor ballroom when they came across some rare insects in the old stone fireplace. A few of them were taken to a lab for research and identification, but evidently they only thrive in a certain kind of mortar. This is one of the few buildings still standing that can provide their "natural habitat." Anyway, that's why this whole area is posted.

All I did was drive through the alley. Look at that chimney. It must be twenty feet above the ground. What can you charge me with?

That's easy. I'm citing you for "driving under the inn flue ants."

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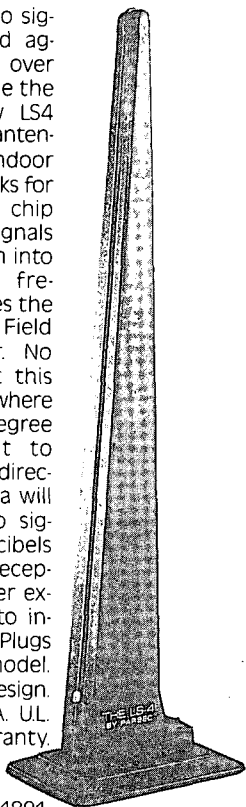
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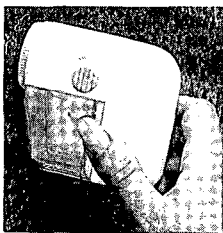
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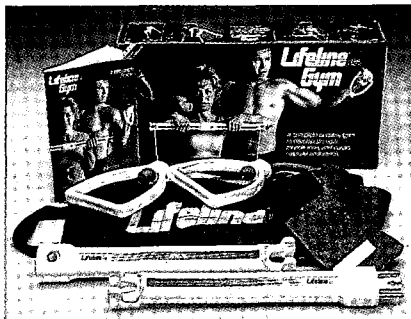


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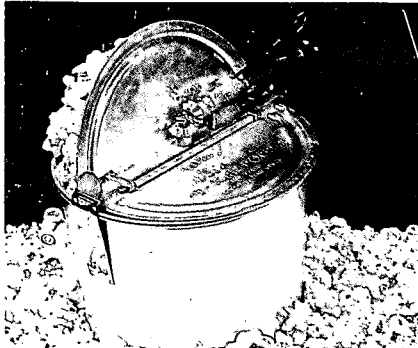
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